



Review Article

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**A REVIEW ON METHIKA (*TRIGONELLA FOENUM GRAECUM* LINN):
A WIDELY USED DRUG IN POSTNATAL CARE IN KERALA, INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

Postnatal care is well explained in Ayurveda under the name Sutika paricharya. In Kerala, there are many special preparations and single drugs are being used for postnatal care in addition to these classical Ayurvedic references. The knowledge of such postnatal care is immense and transferred through generations. It varies according to caste, religion and geographical locations. One of such single drugs is Methika (*Trigonella foenum-graecum* L.). Fenugreek seed commonly used in many food preparations as a condiment. This paper is mainly concentrated to compile the traditional as well as classical references about this plant in Post-natal care. Ayurvedic Samhitas, Nighantus, Textbooks on Ethnomedicine and Internet publications were used to compile the relevant information. After a thorough review eleven different formulations containing Methika as a major ingredient were listed out and it was found that the use of Methika in postnatal period brings vata anulomana, garbhashaya shodhaka, as well as a galactagogue.

Keywords: Sutika paricharya, postnatal care, Methika, Fenugreek, Traditional medicine.**INTRODUCTION**

Sutika paricharya is a unique contribution of Ayurveda. A woman who recently delivered is called sutika. Acharyas have commonly explained duration of sutika kala as 45 days or reappearance of next menstrual cycle after delivery.¹ It is an advanced health care system of folk medicine practices in Kerala, India. The traditional Vaidyas and birth attendants have good knowledge of postnatal care remedies.² It has been transferred from generation to generation as oral traditions. It includes herbal home remedies as food and medicine. These drugs are used as single drug preparations or combinations aiming at the restoration of maternal health, enhancement of breast milk and to manage minor problems like indigestion, constipation, body pain and fever in the postnatal period.

The most commonly used plant parts for preparations were root, seed, leaves, bark or the whole plant.^{3,4} These plant formulations are proved to be effective in rejuvenation after delivery. It is different according to caste, religion and in geographical locations. These medicines are used in the form of ksheera kashaya, ksheera yavagu, lehya, Churna and kwatha preparations.⁵ Agni bala is minimal in sutika immediately

following the period of confinement. So, special diet pattern (peyadikrama) is followed in sutika which is deepana, laghu and brimhana.⁶ These preparations are used as health recipe and also for vata anulomana, garbhashaya shodhaka, stanya vardhaka for sutika. Methika is one of the widely used drugs in traditional postnatal care.

Methika - Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum* L.)

Fenugreek or Greek Hayes is a herb belonging to the family Fabaceae, having 30-60 cm height. It is cultivated as a leafy vegetable and as medicinal plant. Fruits are legumes 5-7 cm long, narrow, curved tapering with a slender point and containing 10-20 deeply furrowed seeds per pod. Seeds and leaves of the plant are used in medicine. Methika possesses katu, tikta rasa, ushna virya and is deepana, Vata shamana, Kaphahara and jwaranasana. Seeds are bitter, mucilaginous, carminative, aromatic, thermogenic, galactagogue, astringent, emollient and an aphrodisiac and used for the treatment of fever, vomiting, anorexia, cough and bronchitis. Leaves are used externally for swellings and burns. The details in different texts are given in Table 1.^{7,8}

Table 1: Methika in different Nighantus

Reference text	Guna	Plant details	Karma
Bhava Prakash 16 th century	Seetha veerya	Bahupatrika Bahubeeja	Deepana, Vatha samani, Sleshmaghna, Jwara nasani
Dhanwanthari Nighandu 8 th -10 th AD	Kadu, Ushna	Bahupatrika	Deepani, arochakahara, Vathapranasini
Raja nighandu 17 th century AD	Kadu, Ushna	Bahupatrika	Deepani, arochakahara, deeptikara, vathasamana
Nighantu ratnakaram 9 th -11 th AD	Kadu, Ushna,		Arochakahara, Vathasamanam

Formulations of Methika

A detailed review of the available classical Ayurveda texts, folklore medicines and Malayalam texts describing the treatment and properties of different plants and formulations, internet database using keywords sutika and fenugreek and results from an in-depth interview with practitioners and birth attendants were collected and compiled. 20 formulations are containing Methika as an ingredient out of which 11 (eleven) are most important and

regularly used in the Traditional postnatal care. Uluvakurukku (porridge), Uluva kanji (gruel), Uluva lehyam, Uluvalayichathu, Uluvakuzhampu, Ullilehyam, Kadupodi, Pettulehyam, Thenginpookkulalehyam, Kozhimarunnu (Pidikkozhi) and Pookkulalehyam are common. Uluva is the Malayalam name of Methika. Some of them are documented in textbooks but majority of them are collected from doctors and birth attendants. The properties of different formulations are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Properties of different formulations of Methika

Preparations	Indications
<i>Uluva lehyam</i>	<i>Vathanulomanam, anaemia</i>
<i>Uluva kurukku (porridge)</i>	<i>Vathanulomanam, Sophaharam</i>
<i>Uluva kuzhampu</i>	<i>Sthanya vardhana</i>
<i>Uluva vilayichathu</i>	<i>Sthanya vardhana</i>
<i>Uluva kanji (gruel)</i>	<i>Sthanya vardhana</i>
<i>Pookkula lehyam</i>	<i>Vathapitha samanam, Prameha, Vasthi sodhanam, Vrishyam</i>
<i>Ulli lehyam</i>	<i>Garbhasaya sodhanam</i>
<i>Kadupodi</i>	<i>Sthanya vardhana</i>
<i>Kozhimarunnu (Pidikkozhi)</i>	<i>Balyam, Vrishyam</i>
<i>Pettulehyam</i>	<i>Sthanya vardhanam, Garbhasaya sodhanam, Vatha samanam</i>
<i>Thenginpookkula lehyam</i>	<i>Rekthasthambhanam, Balyam, kadeesoola, Swedapradaram</i>

DISCUSSION

Methika was mentioned in Samhita period itself but there are no references using this drug in postnatal care in detail. It is one of the ingredients of Dhanvantara taila mentioned in Ashtanga Hridaya Shareera sthana as Kalanusaari. Dhanvantara taila is used for vata shamana, vedana shamana in pre and postnatal care. After getting proper appetite Dhanvantara kashaya is using for alleviating pain.²¹ Methika seeds are the most commonly utilized herbal galactagogue in postnatal care practices in Kerala, India.

Apart from the single drug, many combinations of drugs are also in use. In southern Kerala kurukumarunnu or medicated porridge are used as a healthy recipe in early periods of postnatal care (1st and 2nd week). Here soaked fenugreek seed paste is mixed with rice powder, coconut milk, palm jaggery and cows' ghee to prepare porridge. Uluva kanji (fenugreek gruel) is more used in the middle part of Kerala while uluva kuzhambu and ullilehyam is commonly used in the northern part of Kerala, India. Other preparations made with fenugreek and other drugs are also used for postnatal care especially during the later postnatal period.

A study mentioned that 17 health benefits of Fenugreek for breastfeeding mothers and for increasing milk production without any side effects²². Also, in GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) list fenugreek herb is listed as a safe drug by US Food and Drug Administration and contains high mineral content like Magnesium, Vitamin B6, and Manganese and is widely used for Postpartum Anaemia.²³

CONCLUSION

Herbs have been an integral part of human existence. Several therapeutic potentials of these herbs are yet to be utilized for the betterment of human life. This review uncovers a simple and easily available yet potent herb with extensive use in the postpartum period. Methika (fenugreek) is extensively used in Indian cuisine as a condiment. Scientific studies conducted on fenugreek and traditional knowledge proves its utility in the postpartum period as a galactagogue and in postpartum anaemia. Detailed clinical studies are required for validation and documentation of the benefits of individual preparations and steps should be taken to incorporate such knowledge in Ayurvedic

Pharmacopoeia.

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