

Health Benefitting Postpartum Care Ethnic/Traditional Super Foods of Karnataka

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Abstract - Nutrition plays a major role in lactating women to strengthen the foundation for long-term health for both mother and infant. From aegis, it is a known fact that, all cultures in India and across the world follow certain beliefs and practices including ethnic special/super foods and food taboos during confinement. Our rich traditional knowledge is losing its significance. As an eye opener, a comprehensive view on the traditions with special prominence of selected health benefitting ethnic/traditional super foods given to lactating women across Karnataka, obtained through Focus Group Discussions and Key informants is emphasized. Understanding our ethnic or traditional super foods aids to do further research on traditional superfoods and in turn can contribute in formulating a balanced diet for the modern-day Lactating women without losing our rich traditions.

Key Words: Traditional Knowledge, Lactation, Traditional/Ethnic Super Foods, Postpartum, Confinement

1. INTRODUCTION

Lactation is a demanding physiological state, which requires additional foods for breast feeding of infants. Diet of Lactating women has direct bearing on own health and an indirect bearing on infant health. Women who breastfeed require approximately 500 additional kcal/day as advocated by Western medicine ahead of what is recommended for non-pregnant women. To ensure proper nutritional supplement and healthcare to lactating women a provision of extra food is emphasized both by western medicine and the Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) - precisely, in India the allied streams of Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM). Besides these, across the globe there are many popular traditional practices including special ethnic/traditional super foods given to lactating mothers.

Emphasizing Indian tradition, our ancestors have designed the best practices and foods with a purview on preventive/promotive health care along with the nutritive needs of all stages of an individual. Postpartum care popularly known as 'Confinement' is one of the stages where traditional practices like oil massage, tying of abdomen, hot water bath, fumigation after bath with Dhooopa (Halumaddi, Lobana) etc., are ritually followed. During Confinement special traditional food preparations are given paramount importance in almost every tradition to feed lactating women. Tribals as a distinct group of society have well-defined and widely accepted beliefs system regarding pregnancy, birth, and post-natal period (Behura & Mohanty, 2006; Das, Kumar, Kapoor, & Prasad, 2009; Tripathy et al., 2010). Most of the traditional practices are considered to help mother to regain health, lost vitality, easy bowel movement, support adequate breast milk secretion for nourishing infant and to ensure long term health for both.

According to traditions, the first six weeks after childbirth is a pivotal phase in women's Life. In most cultures, the duration of nurturing of the Lactating Women usually lasts from a minimum of 40 days to 5 months and in few cases, it is extended up to 9 months depending on the convenience and socio-economic conditions. In many cultures, blood and the state of pregnancy itself are often conceived as a state of 'hotness' and conversely, the postpartum period is conceived as a cold and vulnerable state. Likewise, food is also classified as cold or hot food in many cultures. However, there are differences in categorization of the same food among different cultures.

Objective

To gain knowledge on perspective and scope of ethnic/traditional super foods of Karnataka for undertaking further research, and to promote beneficial ethnic/traditional super foods.

Method

Data collection through Focussed Group Discussions (FGD's) and interviews with key informants

2. Perspective on post-partum care Special

Traditional Food

In the initial days of postpartum care especially for the first three days of delivery, traditional practices give prominence to easily digestible soft foods. Subsequently followed by variety of special ethnic/traditional super food using highly selective ingredients to enhance lactation, to regain lost vitality of women, to strengthen the back and reproductive organs post-delivery, to enhance long term immunity of both mother and infant

etc., The rich traditional knowledge shared by the key informants during FGD's are put forth through various categories for better understanding of the benefits of the traditional superfoods. The benefits from the traditional super foods are overlapping.

Traditional Super Food to Regain Balance

Generally, during confinement the lactating women in India are given hot foods such as milk, ghee, nuts and jaggery that are thought to help regain the balance. No salty food is given for the first 2 to 3 days of delivery. Later also salty foods are avoided/ dishes prepared with less salt are given during confinement. From the informant's perspective giving birth to baby is considered as rebirth of mother too. Their opinion is that the digestive system and excretory system are weak; hence they give only easily digestible semi solid traditional food which helps to avoid constipation along with supports to regain their digestive power slowly. Most of the supplements are prepared fresh and are served hot. Nuts in the diet will start only after 12th or 17th day that too in pounded form with other selective ingredients as special foods. Here are selected special preparations given to lactating women.

1. **Bellada (Jaggery) Coffee:** Coffee prepared with jaggery is given soon after delivery. Followed in almost every tradition
2. **Dry roasted Ingu/Hing (Asafoetida) powder:** Dry roasted Asafoetida with honey is given to mother after delivery to relieve from gas formation. In case of hospital delivery, it is given after shifting to ward.
3. **Rawa Ganji (Rawa Porridge):** Semisolid hot ganji prepared with homemade fine Wheat Rawa (Soji), ghee, organic jaggery, Desi milk with a teaspoon of additional ghee is given up to

2 to 3 days of delivery. This porridge is supposed to be easily digestible.

4. **Rice Ganji (Rice Porridge):** Traditionally prepared from parboiled/red rice which is cooked with water till very soft. The porridge is added with a pinch of turmeric with very less salt. This served hot with ghee and milk. Some of them do not use salt, but serve with ghee, jaggery and milk. This preparation is given 3rd day onwards up to 9 days or 12 days. Some of them will continue give once after oil massage and hot water bath till 40 days.
5. **Menthya Ganji (Fenugreek Porridge):** This is prepared using Menthya, rice, Jeerige (Cumin), Sasayi (Dill seeds), Belluli (Garlic), KaLu menasu (Pepper), Vale bella (Palm jaggery) and coconut milk. This ganji is given with desi ghee soon after bath. Few of them feed after oil massage. This will give strength, reduces back pain, enhances lactation.
6. **Kadu Jeerige/kalajeerige Kashaya:** Kashaya prepared with Kadu Jeerige (Black Cumin) is given from 2nd day to 5th day. This is supposed to heal wound, keep sepsis, cold fever away.
7. **Ondelaga chutney:** Chutney prepared from Ondelaga (Brahmi), jeerige, menthya, KaLu menasu (Pepper), coconut. Helps to prevent bananti sannu (post-partum depression, anxiety and stress).

Traditional Super Food to Enhance Lactation

Special food made from sesame seeds, dry nuts, fenugreek seeds/leaves, garlic, drumsticks, carom seeds, dill seeds/leaves etc., are given to enhance milk secretion.

8. **Ellunde (Sesame seed Laddu):** Laddu prepared from dry roasted black Sesame seeds

(traditional preference) along with Jeerige, BoLu Menasina KaaLu (white pepper), Vale Bella and Elakki (Cardamom) given after 7th/9th day of delivery. This super food stimulates lactation, strengthens bones.

9. **Menthya Unde (Methi Laddu):** Laddu Prepared from coarsely pounded Menthya, Milk Ghee, Antu (Gond), Badami (Badami), Elakki, KaLu Menasu and Dry Coconut is given from 12th or 17th day early morning along with hot milk. This stimulates lactation, strengthens back.

10. **Dinku ladu (Dry Fruit laddu):** Prepared using most of the dry fruits like Badami (Badam), Pista, Godambi (Kaju), Drakshi (Rasins), Kobbari (desiccated Coconut), Khus-Khuse (Poppy Seeds), Jayikayi (Jaiphal), elakki, Antu, Ghee and Vale Bella /Joni Jaggery (Liquid Jaggery). This preparation is given after 12 days and in some regions after 24 days of delivery to enhance lactation and also used to strengthen back.

11. **BeLLulli Lehya (Garlic lehya):** Prepared from BeLLulli, Jeerige, Oma (Carom seeds), KaLu Menasu, Tengina kayi (Coconut), Vale Bella. Lehya is given early morning for 17 days. During day time jeerige kashya (Jeera water) is given. This helps to enhance lactation, keeps body warm, helps to develop immunity.

12. **Shunti Lehya (Ginger Lehya):** Prepared with shunti, vale bella, Tengina kayi and ghee. This aids in lactation and cleans the uterus.

13. **Omada Lehya (Carrom seeds lehya):** This lehya is prepared from Oma, Sasive (Mustard), Jeerige, Kottambari (Coriander seeds), Coconut Milk, Ole Bella, joni bella (liquid jaggery),

ghee, coconut oil and garlic. This lehya is given from 5th day early morning with ghee along with a hot glass of milk. This enhances lactation, reduces bloating, aids easy digestion.

14. **Halavu Tayi Makkala Beru (Shatavari chutney):** Prepared from roots of Shatavari (Asparagus), Menthaya, KaLu Menasu, Jeerige, Ghee, Karibevu (Curry leaves) and Tengina kayi. This is given with Ganji or soft rice after 7th day. This enhances lactation, aids digestion, prevents Uri mutra (Urinary Tract infections)

Traditional Food to Strengthen Back and Reproductive Organs

Edible gum with dry fruits wheat and several other food ingredients are given to strengthen the back and reproductive organs post-delivery.

15. **Godi Hittina Unde (Wheat Flour Laddu):** Prepared with Wheat Flour, Godambi (Kaju), Badami, drakshi, Antu (Gond), tuppa, Bella and elakki is given after 7th day of delivery.

16. **Hurali Kattu (Horse Gram Rasam):** Prepared with HuraLi, Jaggery and Hunasehannu rasa (Tamarind pulp), Tuppa, Sasive, jeerige, BeLLuLLi, Karibevu, menasu is given after 3rd day of delivery for meals along with soft rice or mentyha mudde.

Traditional Food to nourish body and to improve Bowel movements

Special food for lactating mothers is usually prepared with desi ghee (pure local ghee) to nourish the body and to improve bowel movements. However, with cultural and economic diversity Ellenne (sesame oil), Kobbari enne (coconut oil), Sasive enne (mustard oil), Uchhellu/gurellu enne (Kala Jeera), is used instead of Ghee.

17. Various preparations from Green leafy vegetables like Sabbasige soppu (dil leaves), Harve soppu (Amaranthus leaves), Basale soppu, Menthe soppu (Methi leaves), Chakramuni soppu (vitamin Plant) with jeerige, KaLu mensu. Apart from bowel movement they are also helpful in enhancing the lactation, improving blood and iron supplements. These preparations are given after 5th or 7th day.
18. Dishes prepared from locally available vegetables like Padawala Kayi (Snake Gourd), Sorekayi (Bottle Gourd), Chawalikayi (Cluster beans), Ustikayi/ Sunde kayi (Turkey berry) eases bowl movements and enhances lactation. These preparations are given after 5th or 7th day.
19. Jeera water is used for stimulation of bowel movements. Given from 2nd or 3rd day onwards.
20. BaLe Hoovina Palya (Banana Flower): BaLe hoovu, Tuppa, Jeerige, Ingu (hing), Arasina (turmeric), Karibevu, Kottambari soppu (Coriander leaves), uppu, Bella, Tenginakayi. This preparation is helpful in bowel movements cleansing of uterus, enhances lactation, immunity, prevents ulcer, controls excessive bleeding. Given after 7th onwards.

Discussion

Traditional postpartum care and practices are followed with a strong belief that if the new-born infant and the mother are not taken proper care, they will be apparently predisposed to many ailments later in life. The experienced elderly person in the family takes care of mother and infant with utmost care imposing lots of dos and “don’ts” during postpartum care. Though practices differ from region to region, the main goal is to keep mother and infant healthy from long term perspective.

Primary aim is to regain lost vitality. Apart from various traditional practices like oil massage, tying of abdomen, hot water bath, keeping body warm, traditional postpartum practices gives main emphasis on exclusive special food preparations with selective food ingredients. Almost all traditions consider Pregnancy and Delivery as “Rebirth of the Women”. Both the infant and mother are given exceptionally royal care. During FGD’s and interviews with the Key informants, the elderly women expressed that digestive system will be weak soon after delivery. Hence, they start giving freshly prepared hot fluids followed by semisolid food in the initial days specially for first three days followed by easily digestible special foods.

Further discussions revealed that first 2 to 3 days only fluid/semisolid foods with liquid consistency like Ganji/Porridge are given. Slowly, food is switched over to the semisolid and then to solid food. But the food given will be exclusively special foods prepared in pure desi preferably homemade ghee with selective food ingredients. Almost all traditions include foods to strengthen the back, uterus, induce or enhance lactation etc., at the same time they avoid gas forming foods. For non-vegetarians, they give special food preparations Kalu soup (Goat), nati koLi (Country chicken), liver preparations etc.

Ghee, Jaggery, Dry fruits, Garlic, Methi, Jeera, Saunf, Ajwain, Ginger, fresh green leafy vegetables are most used ingredients throughout for the variety of the special dish preparations though the combination and mode of preparations vary. This is an indicative of the route of origin of traditions focusing on dedicated care towards recouping the health of mother and to strengthen the health of the infant by meeting the vital nutrient needs.

Elderly's advice is that the special preparations should not be given in one go. They emphasize on hygienic preparation with selective food ingredients and recommend fresh preparations. Wherever, preparations are to be stored they advise to prepare the traditional super food in batches. Exercise some caution to monitor the suitability for mother and the infant. Analytical point of view, most likely, the ingredients used in the preparations are locally available to suit the needs of the individual. If we go on exploring, a lot of unheard food preparations of significant nutritive value with health benefits can be traced.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Traditional Knowledge of our ancestors with respect to healthy nutritional food is amazing. Our elderly people are having lot of understanding about the care during confinement (postpartum care). All in all, most of the traditions on post-partum care believes that the digestive system is weak post-delivery. Therefore, to regain the power of normal digestion special traditional super foods are given in a phased manner. With long list of ethnic/traditional special super food varieties, despite multitude of cultures, religious and racial diversities, varying weather conditions etc., a lot of preparations supports to induce or enhance lactation, to strengthen back and reproductive organs, nourish body and to improve bowel movements. They have been used for generations and mothers have felt good following traditional diet whether it is lactation or strengthening, or overall health of both mother and the infant. In fact, it is losing its vitality since there is lack of documentation and due to oral passage, there is drift in the method of preparation, specific ingredients used and so on.

Keeping thoughts in the modern perspective of nutrigenomics, nutrigenetics, proteomics, metabolomics or personalized diet plan, there is lot of scope in exploring the ethnic food preparations that suits our body to gain long term health benefits during postpartum care. Although, there is limited or lack of scientific research to prove that these ethnic/traditional super foods are the best, they can be considered for further understanding and promotion, since they are time tested. Therefore, efforts should be made to properly document the traditions, traditional food preparations and so on. To support better health care of our young generations, region specific diet plans can be made by using locally available traditional food ingredients that suits most for the genetic make of an individual. Thus, Ethnic Superfoods can contribute in formulating a balanced diet for the modern-day Lactating women without losing our rich traditions.

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