

A Conceptual Study about Karpura from Samhitas

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ABSTRACT

Background: Karpura, the Ayurvedic name for natural camphor derived from *Cinnamomumcamphora* (L.) Nees&Ebern., is a time-honoured drug of the Indian traditional system of medicine. References to this aromatic, white crystalline substance appear in Vedic literature and have been elaborated upon extensively through Samhita and Nighantu periods. Its versatility in both internal and external applications, combined with documented Rasapancaka and multifaceted therapeutic indications, underscores its enduring relevance.

Aim: To carry out a systematic conceptual study of Karpura as described in major AyurvedicSamhitas, Nighantus, and contemporary Ayurvedic texts, and to consolidate its properties, varieties, synonyms, dosage forms, and therapeutic indications.

Methods: An extensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts including Caraka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, AstangaHridaya, Kasyapa Samhita, Bhela Samhita, Sarangadhara Samhita, Bhavaprakasa Samhita, Harita Samhita, and various Nighantus was undertaken. Modern botanical and pharmacological texts were also consulted.

Conclusion: Karpura possesses Pittasamaka property and SheetaVirya. It is beneficial in the management of VataRoga, MukhaRoga, Netra Roga, and a wide spectrum of other ailments. Its culinary, cosmetic, religious, and medicinal utility confirm its status as a drug of outstanding importance in Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia.

Keywords: Karpura, Camphor, *Cinnamomumcamphora*, Ayurveda, Rasapancaka, Nighantus, Dravyaguna, Therapeutic uses

I. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian science of life, has documented an extensive MateriaMedica drawn from plant, animal, and mineral kingdoms. Among the myriad drugs described, Karpura occupies a position of singular importance owing to its unique sensory characteristics, wide therapeutic spectrum, and remarkable cultural significance. Karpura is a white, crystalline, volatile substance with a characteristic penetrating fragrance, obtained chiefly by the hydro-distillation of wood chips, leaves, and roots of *Cinnamomumcamphora* (L.) Nees&Ebern. (Family: Lauraceae).

The use of camphor-like substances has been traced back to the Vedic era. AtharvaParisista and allied texts quoted Karpura for external application (Anulepana) and for offerings to the divine. In classical Ayurvedic texts, it is described with numerous synonyms, varieties, pharmaceutical forms, and elaborate therapeutic indications. The drug holds relevance not merely as a medicine but also in culinary applications, religious rituals, and cosmetics, demonstrating its holistic incorporation into traditional Indian life.

The increasing global interest in natural therapeutics, combined with the demonstrated limitations of synthetic camphor, has renewed academic and clinical focus on Karpura. Since formulations cited in classical Ayurveda refer specifically to natural Karpura, a thorough

conceptual study of this drug in its classical context becomes essential. The present article is a comprehensive consolidation of Karpura references from major Ayurvedic Samhitas and Nighantus, supplemented by modern botanical understanding.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the present study is to conduct a thorough and systematic literary review of Karpura as described across Ayurvedic Samhitas, Nighantus, and contemporaneous Ayurvedic texts. The objectives are: (i) to document the botanical identity, morphology, and taxonomical position of Karpura; (ii) to compile its synonyms, varieties, and Rasapancaka from various textual sources; (iii) to consolidate classical references to its therapeutic indications, pharmaceutical forms, and dosage; and (iv) to discuss its relevance in modern clinical practice.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology adopted for this study is predominantly textual and analytical. The following classical Ayurvedic texts were systematically reviewed: Caraka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Astanga Hridaya, Kasyapa Samhita, Bhela Samhita, Sarangadhara Samhita, Bhavaprakasa Samhita, and Harita Samhita. Nighantus including Dhanvantari Nighantu, Kaiyadeva Nighantu, Bhavaprakasa Nighantu, Raja Nighantu, Sodala Nighantu, Madanapala Nighantu, Priya Nighantu, and Gunaratnamala were also consulted. Modern botanical texts such as K.M. Nadakarni's Indian Materia Medica, the Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia of India (Part I, Vol. 6), and relevant peer-reviewed research articles were referenced for comparative analysis.

4. BOTANICAL IDENTITY AND TAXONOMY

4.1 Nomenclature and Etymology

The botanical name of Karpura is *Cinnamomum camphora* (L.) Nees & Ebern., belonging to the family Lauraceae. The term

"Cinnamomum" is derived from the Greek word *Kinnamomum*, meaning spice. Karpura is variously referred to in classical Sanskrit literature as Candrabhasma (moon powder), one of the five flavours employed in Tambula (betel) chewing, as cited in Vaidyaka-Sabdasindhu.

4.2 Taxonomical Classification

Kingdom: Plantae; Sub-kingdom: Viridiplantae; Division: Tracheophyta; Class: Magnoliopsida; Order: Laurales; Family: Lauraceae; Genus: Cinnamomum; Species: camphora.

4.3 Vernacular Names

Sanskrit: Karpura; Hindi: Karpur, Karpuram; English: Camphor tree, Camphor laurel, Japanese camphor; Kannada: Pachekarpura; Bengali: Karpur; Telugu: Karpooram Chettu; Tamil: Karpooram, Pachai Karpooram; Marathi: Karpur; Gujarati: Karpur.

4.4 Morphology

Cinnamomum camphora is a medium to large-sized evergreen tree, growing up to 40 metres in height with a trunk diameter reaching up to 3 metres. The bark is yellow to brown, deeply longitudinally fissured, and cracked into a grid-like pattern. Leaves are alternate, simple, with three to several distinct nerves, releasing a strong camphor odour when crushed. Flowers are bisexual, creamy white, actinomorphic, borne in axillary terminal panicles. Fruit is a round, one-seeded, fleshy drupe, 7–8 mm wide, turning purple-black at maturity. Seeds are small with a characteristic Karpura fragrance. The plant is a native of China and East Asia but is widely cultivated in India, South Africa, and other tropical and subtropical regions.

IV. SYNONYMS OF KARPURA

The numerous synonyms ascribed to Karpura in Ayurvedic literature predominantly reflect its physical characteristics – namely its white, snow-like appearance and its cold, refreshing potency. A compilation of significant synonyms with their etymological significance is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Synonyms of Karpura and Their Significance

Synonym	Meaning / Significance
Hima	Snow – white color resembling snow
Indu	Moon – white and cool like the moon
Ghanasara	Essence extracted from dense material
Sitabhra	Cool and radiant
Candra	Moon-like white, cool in nature

Himavalluka	Sandy snow-like crystals
Tushara	Frost – cold and white
Spatika	Crystal – transparent, pure white
Soma	Moon – coolant, nourishing
Sitasiva	Cool and auspicious

New synonyms contributed by individual Nighantukara authors include Himahvaya (AstangaNighantu), Himopala, Bhutika, Himabra, Tuhina, and Sasi (DhanvantariNighantu), and Soma (PriyaNighantu). Both DhanvantariNighantu and ManadadiNighantu added Sitalaraja to the list of recognised synonyms.

V. VARIETIES OF KARPURA

Different Ayurvedic texts classify Karpura into varying numbers of types based on source, mode of processing, and Rasa-Guna-Virya properties.

Table 2: Varieties of Karpura According to Different Texts

Nighantu / Text	No. of Types	Types Mentioned
BhavaprakasaNighantu	Two	Pakva (Artificial), Apakva (Natural)
DhanvantariNighantu	Three	CinakaKarpura, PakvaKarpura, ApakvaKarpura
SodalaNighantu	Two	PakvaKarpura, ApakvaKarpura
KaiyadevaNighantu	Three	Ishavasa, Himasanjnaka, Potashraya
Raja Nighantu	Fourteen	Pitasa, Bhimasena, Sitakara, Sankaravas, Pransu, Pinja, Abdasara, Himayuta, Baluka, Jutika, Tusara, Hima, Sitala, Pakvika

Chunekarji elaborated four varieties: (i) Bhimseni or BarasKarpura (D. camphora) – the most valued natural variety; (ii) Cini or JapaniKarpura (D. camphora) – of Chinese and Japanese origin; (iii) Patri or NagiKarpura – derived from Blumeabalsamifera and allied species; and (iv) KrutimaKarpura – the synthetic variety now widely available commercially. Classical Ayurvedic formulations, however, are designed exclusively for natural Karpura, and substitution with synthetic camphor is clinically inadvisable.

7. RASAPANCAKA (PHARMACODYNAMICS) OF KARPURA

The pharmacodynamic profile of Karpura is described consistently across major AyurvedicNighantus and Samhitas. The consolidated Rasapancaka is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Rasapancaka of Karpura

Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka	Doshakarma
Tikta, Katu, Madhura	Laghu, Teekshna	Sheeta	Katu	Tridoshahara

The predominant Rasa (taste) of Karpura is Tikta (bitter) and Katu (pungent), with Madhura (sweet) also recognised by several Nighantukara authors. The Guna (quality) is primarily Laghu (light) and Teekshna (sharp/penetrating). Virya (potency) is Sheetata (cold), making it primarily Pittasamaka (pacifier of Pitta Dosha). Vipaka (post-digestive taste) is Katu. The overall Doshakarma is Tridoshahara, with predominant Kaphapittahara action. Additional Karma noted includes Lekhana

(scraping), Caksusya (beneficial for eyes), Vedanasthapana (analgesic), Hridya (cardiotonic), Medhya (intellect-promoting), Vrsya (aphrodisiac), and Durgandhanasaka (deodorant).

Part Used: Nirryasa (resinous exudate / extracted camphor from wood and leaves by steam distillation). **Dose:** 125–375 mg per day in divided doses (for internal use). Camphor is reported to be toxic above 2–20 g.

8. CLASSICAL REVIEW OF KARPURA IN AYURVEDIC TEXTS

Karpura has been referenced across virtually every major classical Ayurvedic text. The nature and extent of its use evolved progressively from the

Samhita period (primarily restricted use) through the medieval Nighantu period (expanded therapeutic and culinary applications). A consolidated reference chart of major Samhita mentions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Classical References to Karpura Across Major Ayurvedic Samhitas

Text	Synonym	Reference	Form	Indication
Caraka Samhita	Karpura	C.S. Su. 5/77	Curna	MukhaVaisadhya, Aruci
Caraka Samhita	Karpura	C.S. Ci. 26/204	Curna	KhadiradiGutika
Susruta Samhita	Karpura	S.S. Su. 46/202	Curna	AsyaDourgandyaNasaka
Susruta Samhita	Sitasiva	S.S. Su. 14/36	Curna	SonitaPravartana in Vrana
AstangaHridaya	Karpura	A.H. Su. 3/20	Curna	Snana in GrishmaRtu
AstangaHridaya	Karpura	A.H. Ci. 21/78	Curna	VataRoga
Kasyapa Samhita	Karpura	K.S. Su. 23/12.1	Curna	Svedana
Sarangadhara Samhita	Karpura	Sa.S. Ma. 6/67	PippalyadiCurna	VatajaGrahani
Bhavaprakasa Samhita	Karpura	BP.S. Ma. 24/313	Maha Narayana Taila	VataRogas
Harita Samhita	Karpura	Tritiya Sthana 55/21	Curna	ChandraprabhaVati

8.1 Caraka Samhita

AcaryaCaraka referenced Karpura primarily in the context of oral hygiene and digestive complaints. In C.S. Sutra Sthana 5/77, KarpuraCurna is recommended for MukhaVaisadhya (foetid odour of the oral cavity) and Aruci (anorexia). As a component of KhadiradiGutika (C.S. Cikitsa Sthana 26/204), Karpura is indicated in respiratory infections, and it appears in BalaTaila preparations (C.S. Ci. 28/152) used in paediatric care for all diseases (Sarvamaya).

8.2 Susruta Samhita

AcaryaSusruta references Karpura under its synonym Sitasiva in the context of Vrana (wound) management, Sirorogas (head diseases), and as a key ingredient of MahasugandhiAgada – a classical antidote indicated in Visa (poisoning). Susruta also identified the Lekhana (scraping) property of Karpura (S.S. Sutra Sthana 46/203), a pharmacological action that underlies its use in Prameha (metabolic disorders) and Kaphavikara (conditions of Kapha excess).

8.3 AstangaHridaya

Vagbhata'sAstangaHridaya provides the most elaborate Samhita-period references to Karpura. It is recommended for external bathing (Snana) during

GrishmaRtu (summer season) owing to its SheetaVirya. In Cikitsa Sthana, Karpura appears as Sasankakiranakhya (a poetic synonym meaning "rays of the moon") in a formulation for Arocaka (loss of appetite) and MukhaRoga (oral diseases). It is mentioned in twelve or more contexts across Sutra, Cikitsa, and Uttara Sthanas of the text.

8.4 Sarangadhara Samhita

AcaryaSarangadhara's 13th-century compendium provides extensive poly-herbal formulations containing Karpura. JatiphaladiCurna and PippalyadiCurna (indicated in Grahani, Kasa, Pratisyaya, and Svasa) and IrimedadiTaila (for Dantasausra, dental caries) are prominent examples. Karpura also appears in ophthalmic formulations such as PuspahariRasakriya and KathakadiRasanjanam, indicating its Caksusya karma.

8.5 Bhavaprakasa Samhita

Bhavamisra'sBhavaprakasa Samhita represents the most comprehensive single-text repository of Karpura references, with over twenty-four distinct mentions spanning Vajikarana (aphrodisiac), Netra Roga (eye diseases), VataRoga, Raktapitta, Yoni Roga, Kusta, and Siroruja (headache) among others. The text describes Karpura's inclusion in Maha

Narayana Taila for Vata disorders, CandanadiTaila for Raktapitta and Kusta, and Nayanamritanjana for all types of Netra Roga.

8.6 Harita Samhita

Harita Samhita references Karpura in Svarya (voice-promoting), Kantiya (throat-beneficial), and Rucya (taste-promoting) contexts (Prathama Sthana 17/33). Notably, Karpura appears as a constituent of ChandraprabhaVati (Tritiya Sthana 55/21), a celebrated formulation in classical and contemporary Ayurvedic practice, principally indicated in urinary tract diseases (Madhumeha and allied conditions).

8.7 BhaishajyaRatnavali

BhaishajyaRatnavali, authored by KavirajGovind Das Sen in the 18th century, represents a compiled compendium that incorporates references from

earlier texts. A systematic screening of all three volumes of this text reveals Karpura as an ingredient in 113 distinct formulations. These span 33 Rasa preparations, 19 Taila, 16 Modaka, 9 Curna, 7 Vati/Gutika, 6 Anjana, and several Lepa, Asava, and Ghrita preparations. This extensive presence confirms the expanding role of Karpura in the post-Samhita, medieval Ayurvedic tradition.

9. THERAPEUTIC INDICATIONS

The therapeutic scope of Karpura as described across Ayurvedic literature is remarkably broad, encompassing conditions across multiple organ systems. Table 5 presents the major Roga (diseases) in which Karpura finds indication, along with their modern clinical equivalents.

Table 5: Therapeutic Indications of Karpura in Ayurvedic Literature

Ayurvedic Disease (Roga)	Modern Equivalent / Interpretation
Adhmana	Flatulence / Bloating
Agnimandya	Diminished digestive fire
Aruci	Anorexia / Loss of taste
Atisara	Diarrhoea
Daha	Burning sensation
DantaKrimi / Dantasula	Dental caries / Toothache
Kandu	Itching / Pruritus
Kasa	Cough
Kustha	Skin diseases
Medoroga	Obesity / Fat disorders
Mutraghata	Urinary obstruction
Netra Roga	Eye diseases
Pratisyaya	Rhinitis / Nasal congestion
Svasa	Dyspnoea / Asthma
Trsna	Excessive thirst
Visa Vikara	Toxic / Poisoning conditions
Vrana	Wounds / Ulcers
Yoni Roga	Gynaecological disorders

9.1 Dosage Forms (Kalpana)

Karpura is administered in a wide range of pharmaceutical forms as per the route of administration and the nature of the disease. Internal administration employs Curna (powder), Vati

(tablet), Modaka (electuary), and Asava (fermented preparation). External application employs Taila (medicated oil), Anjana (collyrium), Lepa (paste), Varti (suppository/wick), Nasya (nasal instillation), and Pariseka (medicated wash/spray). This broad

pharmaceutical versatility is one of the hallmarks of Karpura's clinical utility in Ayurvedic practice.

9.2 Important Classical Formulations

Among the important Ayurvedic formulations containing Karpura as a key ingredient, the following are particularly noteworthy: Karpurasava (digestive tonic), ChandrabhaVati (urinary and metabolic disorders), KhadiradiGutika (oral and respiratory health), JatiphaladiCurna (Grahani and respiratory complaints), Maha Narayana Taila (Vata disorders and musculoskeletal conditions), IrmedadiTaila (dental and oral care), GandharajaTaila (neurological conditions), CandanadiTaila (Pitta disorders), and KarpuraGhrita (post-surgical pain management, with recent clinical evidence supporting its analgesic efficacy in post-haemorrhoidectomy pain).

10. MODERN PERSPECTIVE AND CLINICAL RELEVANCE

Modern pharmacological research has validated several of the classical Ayurvedic claims for Karpura. Camphor, as an essential oil, has demonstrated antispasmodic, analgesic, stimulant, anti-neuralgic, and nervous-pacifying properties in experimental studies. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved camphor as a topical pain reliever at concentrations of 3–11%. Its role as an anti-inflammatory and analgesic agent has been extensively documented in the context of musculoskeletal, dermatological, and post-operative pain management.

Natural Karpura obtained from *Cinnamomum camphora* is distinctly different from synthetic camphor (*Krutima Karpura*) in its chemical composition and biological activity. Synthetic camphor, produced through chemical processes from turpentine oil, lacks several of the co-occurring phytochemicals present in natural camphor, which may account for the superior therapeutic profile of the natural drug. The Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia of India (API) Part I, Volume 6 has extensively catalogued the identity, purity, strength, chemical constituents, therapeutic actions, formulations, and standard dose for Karpura, providing a regulatory framework for its quality assurance.

From an Ayurvedic clinical perspective, KarpuraGhrita has been evaluated in a randomised controlled trial as a topical analgesic in post-haemorrhoidectomy patients, demonstrating analgesic efficacy comparable to lignocaine jelly 2%, while potentially offering superior wound healing through its classical Vrana-Ropana (wound

healing) properties. Such integrative studies bridge the classical and evidence-based understanding of this drug.

11. DISCUSSION

The literary review conducted in the present study reveals that Karpura was known and used since the Vedic era, with its therapeutic utility expanding progressively through the Samhita and Nighantu periods. The drug's consistent Rasapancaka – particularly its SheetaVirya and Pittasamaka property – provides the pharmacological rationale for its use in conditions characterised by Daha (burning), Trsna (thirst), and Pitta-predominant pathologies.

The proliferation of synonyms, predominantly referring to cold, white, moon-like qualities, is a testament to the ancient Ayurvedic scholar's keen observational and descriptive tradition. The diversity of varieties recognised – from natural ApakvaKarpura to processed PakvaKarpura and regional types such as Bhimseni, Cini, and PatriKarpura – demonstrates the sophisticated botanical and pharmaceutical knowledge of the Nighantukara era.

The therapeutic breadth of Karpura, spanning respiratory, digestive, urinary, ophthalmic, neurological, dermatological, and gynaecological domains, reflects its status as a Tridosahara (balancing all three Doshas) drug. Its documented action in 113 formulations within BhaishajyaRatnavali alone indicates that the medieval Ayurvedic tradition placed considerable clinical confidence in this drug. A critical consideration emerging from this review is the distinction between natural and synthetic camphor. As classical formulations were composed with Apakva (natural) Karpura, the indiscriminate substitution of synthetic camphor in modern preparations may compromise clinical outcomes. Greater emphasis on natural Karpura cultivation, quality standardisation, and pharmaceutical processing is, therefore, warranted.

12. CONCLUSION

The present conceptual study establishes that Karpura (*Cinnamomum camphora*) is one of the most comprehensively documented drugs in the Ayurvedic Materia Medica. Its literary journey from the Vedic period through the classical Samhita era to the comprehensive Nighantu tradition reflects an evolving, deepening understanding of its botanical identity, pharmacological properties, and clinical applications. With Tikta-Katu-Madhura Rasa,

Laghu-TeekshnaGuna, SheetaVirya, KatuVipaka, and Tridosahara Karma, Karpura is an outstanding example of a single drug capable of addressing a vast spectrum of human ailments. Its principal indications in VataRoga, MukhaRoga, Netra Roga, Kasa, Svasa, TvakRoga, and Visa conditions – combined with its utility in culinary, cosmetic, and religious domains – place Karpura in a category of drugs that transcend pure pharmacological utility to represent a truly integrative tradition of healing. Modern clinical and pharmacological evidence continues to validate the Ayurvedic understanding of this remarkable drug, opening avenues for further translational research.

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