



Review Article

VIRUDDHA AHARA: CLASSICAL CONCEPTS, MODERN CORRELATES AND TOXICOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

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ABSTRACT

Viruddha Ahara is a core Ayurvedic concept that can be correlated with the concept of an incompatible diet and dietary practices capable of disturbing normal physiology and promoting disease. The present review was undertaken to explore a relationship between *Viruddha Ahara* and fast-paced dietary practices of modern era in order to identify its possible toxicological significance. Classical Ayurvedic literature describes incompatibility in terms of improper combination, processing, quantity, time of intake, season, digestive capacity, and individual suitability, resulting in impairment of *Agni* (digestive and metabolic power), which further causes *Ama* (toxic metabolic by-products) formation, leading to *Dosha* vitiation and *Dhatu* dysfunction. In modern nutritional science, this dietary incompatibility can be understood through adverse food interactions, altered digestion and absorption, dysbiosis, inflammatory responses, oxidative stress, and cumulative metabolic burden. Repeated exposure to incompatible dietary patterns may contribute to gastrointestinal disturbance, inflammatory states, metabolic dysfunction, and possible hepato-renal stress. The concept is therefore not limited to food combination alone, but represents a broader perspective in terms of food intake, the host's health status, processing and final products of digestion. Integrative interpretation of *Viruddha Ahara* may help strengthen preventive dietary counselling and guide future experimental studies on incompatible food combinations in Ayurveda and modern medical science.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara (food) is described as one of the three *Upastambhas* (sub-pillars) of the human body, providing essential nutrients necessary for digestion and metabolism.^[1] Ayurveda provides a systemic understanding about the effect of food on our physical and mental functioning. Food taken in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body and on contrary, if taken in improper manner leads to various diseases.

Viruddha Ahara is the origin of most of the ailments. As per *Acharya Charaka*, any food that vitiates the *Doshas* without expelling them from the body, rendering them unsuitable or detrimental, is termed as *Viruddha Ahara*.^[2]

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Viruddha Ahara* not only vitiates the *Doshas* but also afflicts the *Dhatus*.^[3] Classical Ayurvedic texts do not restrict the idea to a single harmful pair of foods; rather, there is a description of distinct types of dietary incompatibilities that depend upon the interaction among *Ahara*, *Agni*, *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Kala*, *Desha*, and individual constitution. In this view, food acts as both sustainer and pathogenic factor depending on its compatibility with the host.

In chapter *Atreya Bhadrakapiya Adhyaya* of *Charak Samhita*, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned 18 distinct types of dietary incompatibilities that may lead to toxin formation such as *Ama*, responsible for the pathogenesis of various ailments.

1. *Desh Viruddha*: Consuming substances unsuitable for the region. For instance, consuming dry and spicy foods in arid regions.
2. *Kala Viruddha*: Consuming substances unsuitable for the season. For example, consuming pungent and hot foods during hot seasons.

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3. *Agni Viruddha*: Consuming foods that disrupt digestion. For instance, heavy foods with weak digestion or light foods with strong digestion.
4. *Matra Viruddha*: Consuming substances in inappropriate quantities. For example, consuming equal amounts of honey and ghee.
5. *Satmya Viruddha*: Consuming substances that are incompatible with one's habitual diet. For instance, consuming sweet and cold foods when accustomed to spicy and hot foods.
6. *Dosha Viruddha*: Using treatments or diets that aggravate one's physiological *Doshas* constitution. For example, eating excessive hot, spicy, pungent food substances while being of *Pitta Pradhana Prakriti*.
7. *Sanskar Viruddha*: Consuming substances prepared in a way that may be toxic. For example, heated honey.
8. *Veerya Viruddha*: Combining substances with conflicting potencies. For example, mixing hot and cold potency foods like fish and milk.
9. *Koshtha Viruddha*: Consuming substances that don't suit one's bowel nature. For instance, administering strong laxatives to a person with *Mridu Koshtha*.
10. *Avastha Viruddha*: Consuming substances that are inappropriate for one's current condition. For example, consuming *Vata*-aggravating foods after physical exertion.
11. *Krama Viruddha*: Consuming substances in the wrong sequence. For example, consuming yogurt at night or hot water after honey.
12. *Parihara Viruddha*: Consuming substances that counteract remedies. For instance, consuming hot foods after consuming pork.
13. *Upchara Viruddha*: Consuming substances that counteract treatments. For example, consuming cold foods after ghee intake.
14. *Paaka Viruddha*: consuming improperly cooked foods. For example, foods cooked with bad fuel or overcooked.
15. *Samyoga Viruddha*: Consuming substances that form toxic combinations. For example, combining sour substances with milk.
16. *Hridaya Viruddha*: Consuming substances disliked by the individual.
17. *Sampad Viruddha*: Consuming substances that lack proper qualities. For instance, consuming unripe or overripe foods.
18. *Vidhi Viruddha*: Following improper eating etiquettes. For example, eating in public or open places or laughing while eating food.

Food-to-food interactions pose a serious concern, necessitating attention to prevent potential long term adverse effects on bodily organs. Although many of these interactions may seem harmless

initially, it is wise to be mindful of their negative effects in the long run. Advances in modern technology and biochemistry facilitate a deeper understanding of underlying mechanisms of *Viruddha Ahara*.

Modern research has also attempted to correlate this classical concept with health issues such as indigestion, altered metabolism, inflammatory dietary patterns, free radical formation, microbiome disturbance, and chronic disease risk.^[4] These observations indicate that the Ayurvedic concepts are highly relevant in the present era of processed foods, irregular eating habits, and chemically altered diets.

The aim of this review is to present the Ayurvedic conceptual basis of *Viruddha Ahara*, examine its modern correlations, discuss its mode of action and interpret its significance through a modern toxicological lens.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This manuscript is a narrative review based on published literature relevant to *Viruddha Ahara* and its modern correlations. Relevant information was collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, indexed biomedical sources, and full-text Ayurveda-related publications that discuss the definition, types, pathogenesis, food interactions, and modern correlations of *Viruddha Ahara*.

The inclusion criteria consisted of publications directly addressing *Viruddha Ahara* as a classical Ayurvedic concept; articles discussing its types, mode of action, or clinical significance; and papers that attempted modern interpretation through nutrition, metabolism, inflammation, gut physiology, or toxicology. The exclusion criteria were articles unrelated to dietary incompatibility, papers lacking conceptual knowledge related to Ayurveda, and sources making unsupported claims with insufficient evidence.

The review was conducted in a descriptive manner and Classical Ayurvedic concepts were summarized from literature describing the framework of *Viruddha Ahara*, including *Samyoga Viruddha*, *Samskara Viruddha*, *Veerya Viruddha*, *Matra Viruddha*, and other related categories. These concepts were then mapped along with the modern concepts of dietary incompatibility, altered digestibility, food-food interactions, processing-induced changes, oxidative stress and inflammatory pathway activation. Since this was a review article and not an interventional study, no dosage, route of administration, or experimental allocation was applicable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ayurvedic definition in *Brihatrayi*

Charak Samhita: All drugs and food substances which dislodge the *Dosha* from their normal site but does not

expel them out of the body are termed as *Viruddha* or unwholesome.^[5]

Such food combinations are unwholesome for the normal functioning of *Dhatu* and *Doshas* of the body, as they are opposed to the proper growth and nourishment of *Dhatu*.

Sushruta Samhita: According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the food substances which dislodge the *Doshas* from their original site, but do not expel them out of the body and vitiate the *Rasadi Dhatus*, and also do not take part in nourishment of *Dhatu*, is known as *Viruddha Ahara*.^[6] However, because of vitiation of *Doshas* and *Dhatu*, they produce many diseases, when consumed for a long period of time.

Ashtanga Haridaya: That which vitiates the *Doshas* but does not expel them from the body is known as *Viruddha*.^[7] Incompatible foods should be understood as similar to *Visha* (poison) and *Gara Visha* (latent/concocted poison).^[8]

Ashtanga Sangraha: Any food substance that provokes or aggravates the *Doshas* but does not remove them from the body is called *Viruddha*, because it opposes the normal nourishment of *Dhatu*.^[9]

Ayurvedic definition in *Laghutrayi*

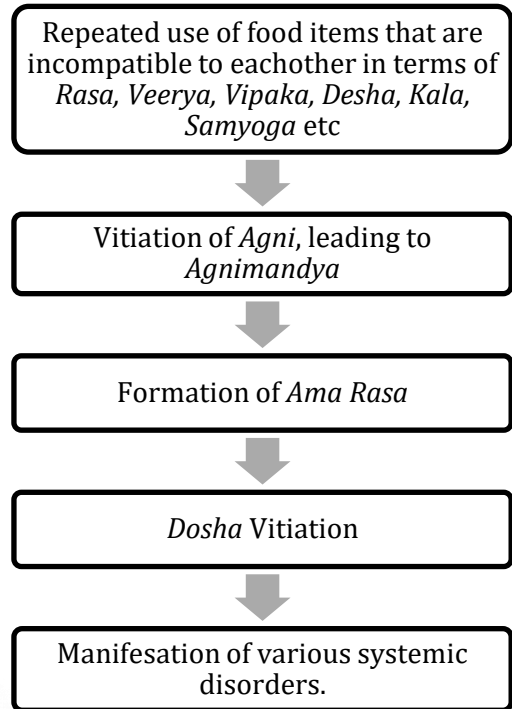
There is no direct mention of *Viruddha Ahara* in any of *Laghutrayis*. But there is mention of *Swabhavata Hitkara Ahara Dravyas* in *Bhavaprakasha*, with a small reference to *Samyoga Viruddha Ahara*.^[10] Other than this, there is no reference of *Viruddha Ahara* in either *Sharangdhara Samhita* or *Madhava Nidana*.

Mode of Action

Classical Ayurvedic texts defines *Viruddha Ahara* as diet or dietary behaviour that is antagonistic to tissues, metabolism, or physiological compatibility. This antagonism may arise due to improper combination, processing, quantity, potency, season, timing, or method of intake, and not merely because an individual food item is harmful in itself. Therefore, *Viruddha Ahara* is better understood as a broad framework of dietary incompatibility than just a list of prohibited food items.

It has further been noted that repeated use of food items that are incompatible to each other can impair *Agni*, generate *Ama*, vitiate *Doshas* and affect *Dhatu* nourishment, eventually leading to various pathologies such as: *Klaibya* (impotency), *Andhya* (blindness), *Visarpa* (erysipelas), *Jalodara* (ascites), *Unmada* (insanity), *Bhagandara* (fistula in ano), *Murcha* (coma/fainting), *Aadhmaana* (abdominal distention), *Galgraha* (obstruction in throat), *Pandu Roga* (anemia), *Ama* (endogenous toxin), *Kilasa* (leucoderma), *Kushtha* (various skin disorders), *Grahani* (sprue), *Shotha* (swelling or oedema),

Amalapitta (acidity), *Jwara* (fever), *Pinasa* (allergic rhinitis), *Santana Dosha* (infertility problem), *Mrutyu* (death).^[11]



This cumulative and systemic model gives the concept strong preventive value because it emphasizes chronic exposure rather than immediate toxicity alone. In addition, the same dietary item may be suitable or unsuitable depending on its constitution, digestive strength, adaptation, and environmental context, indicating that Ayurveda recognizes host variability in dietary response.

Viruddha Ahara remains highly relevant because many present-day food habits involve incompatible mixing, repeated reheating, preservation, and intake without regard to digestion or season. Therefore, the classical description of dietary incompatibilities offers a preventive lens through which modern lifestyle habits can be looked upon. Instead of viewing *Viruddha Ahara* as a rigid dietary prohibition, it can be understood as a dynamic warning against violating the principles of bodily compatibility.

Modern concept and correlations

There is no exact modern equivalent of *Viruddha Ahara*, but several biomedical constructs overlap with it. These include gut dysbiosis, altered nutrient handling, metabolic stress, impaired digestion, oxidative stress and chronic low-grade inflammation.

Underlying Mechanisms

a) Gut dysbiosis: Diet is one of the most important determinants of gut microbiota composition. Diet consisting of low fibre but high calories can reduce the beneficial bacteria in the gut and favour the growth of harmful bacteria. This shift reduces the production of short-chain fatty acids, which are

essential for maintaining the gut lining integrity and instead, weakens the mucus layer and epithelial barrier, leading to increased intestinal permeability. [12]

b) Endotoxemia and activation of inflammatory pathways: When the intestinal barrier function is compromised, microbial products like lipopolysaccharide (LPS) from Gram-negative bacteria move into the circulation. These circulating lipopolysaccharides then bind to Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) on macrophages and other immune cells, activating the NF- κ B signalling pathway and triggering release of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF- α , IL-1 β , and IL-6. This state is termed as metabolic endotoxemia and is a key driver of insulin resistance, obesity, and chronic inflammatory pathways. [13]

c) Metabolic and oxidative stress: Altered digestion and abnormal substrate fermentation can lead to

accumulation of incompletely processed metabolites which alters the pH of the gut, and further disrupts the microbial composition. Repeated exposure to energy-dense and poor fibre meals can increase the hepatic lipid load, promote oxidative stress, and can lead to hepatic steatosis and metabolic dysfunction. Increased reactive oxygen species (ROS) and impaired antioxidant defence activate redox-sensitive transcription factors which further amplifies inflammatory pathway signalling. [12]

These mechanisms explain how repeated dietary “incompatibility” can first manifest as gastrointestinal symptoms (bloating, indigestion, irregular bowel habits) and later as systemic metabolic or inflammatory disorders such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and cardiovascular disease.

Food combinations and dietary patterns that modern medicine considers unfavourable [12,13]

S.No.	Pattern / Combination	Underlying Mechanism	Clinical Relevance
1.	High-fat and high-sugar diet: pastries, desserts with cream, deep-fried sweets, sugar-rich fast foods.	Promotes postprandial metabolic stress, excess energy intake, increased circulating LPS after high-fat meals, activation of TLR4–NF- κ B pathway.	Associated with obesity, insulin resistance and chronic inflammation.
2.	Ultra-processed foods consisting of refined carbohydrates: packaged snacks, white bread, sweetened beverages, instant meals.	Reduces the short-chain fatty acids production, decreases microbial diversity, increases pathobionts.	Associated with gut dysbiosis, metabolic syndrome, and inflammatory bowel disease risk.
3.	Red meat with refined starches: burgers, sausages, processed meat with white bread or fries.	High in saturated fat and heme iron which promotes nitrosamine formation and increases inflammatory burden.	Associated with higher risk of colorectal cancer and metabolic disorders.
4.	Alcohol consumption with heavy meals.	Increases mucosal irritation and gut permeability which synergistically worsens the gut dysbiosis.	Associated with alcoholic hepatitis, non-alcoholic liver disease progression, and systemic inflammation.

d) Viruddha Ahara as a triggering factor for various gastro-intestinal disorders

Gastrointestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), lactose intolerance, and celiac disease can be viewed as clinical expressions in which *Viruddha Ahara* can be portrayed as a triggering or aggravating factor. In IBS, dietary triggers such as high-FODMAP (fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides, and polyols) foods, high-fat meals, irregular eating patterns, and problematic food combinations align with the concept of *Agni Viruddha*, *Kala Viruddha*, and

Samyoga Viruddha, and are associated with gut dysbiosis, visceral hypersensitivity, and chronic low-grade inflammation. In inflammatory bowel disease, westernized diets being ultra-processed, rich in saturated fats, and refined carbohydrates worsen mucosal inflammation and gut dysbiosis, consistent with *Viruddha Ahara* as a pro-inflammatory dietary pattern. In lactose-intolerant individuals, milk- especially in incompatible combinations such as with sour fruits, fish, banana- acts as *Viruddha Ahara*, producing fermentative gas and *Ama*-like metabolites. In celiac disease and non-celiac gluten sensitivity, gluten-containing

foods function as disease-incompatible foods (*Avastha Viruddha*), triggering autoimmune or inflammatory responses and intestinal damage. Thus, *Viruddha Ahara* represents a broad dietary framework and acts as a conceptual bridge, linking diverse food intolerances with gut dysbiosis-associated gastrointestinal recognised in modern medicine.^[14]

CONCLUSION

Viruddha Ahara being a core Ayurvedic concept, describes incompatible food combinations that can be harmful for the body. It includes description of various types of combinations like *Samyoga Viruddha* (milk with sour fruits), *Matra Viruddha* (combining equal quantities of honey and ghee), *Desha Viruddha* (consuming dry and pungent foods in *Jangala Desha* or arid conditions), *Kala Viruddha* (eating at improper times) and others. The pathogenesis of disease manifestation includes *Agni Dushti*, which leads to *Ama* formation and causes *Dosha* and *Dhatu* vitiation. This concept has a strong correlation with modern scientific understanding of maldigestion, gut microbiome imbalance, inflammation, oxidative stress, and toxic buildup in the body.

The key finding of this review denotes that *Viruddha Ahara* represents an early understanding of dietary risk that predicted modern knowledge about how food interacts within the body. Ayurveda uses terms like *Agni*, *Dosha*, *Ama*, and *Dhatu*, while modern science uses terms like digestion, inflammation, metabolism, and gut dysbiosis. The words maybe different, but both systems agree on one important point: food does more harm than good when consumed in excess, not taken according to the bodily needs, is not prepared properly, or is eaten repeatedly in combinations that stresses the body, especially the gut-brain axis.

This concept is especially important today because of the rise in ultra-processed foods, irregular eating times, foods that are reheated many times, artificial preservatives, sedentary lifestyles, and dietary patterns that put undue stress on the body. Given the growing global burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and hypertension, it becomes extremely important to understand this concept of dietary incompatibility in more depth. According to the data reports of World Health Organization, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) caused at least 43 million deaths in 2021, which is approximately 75% of all deaths worldwide, and about 18 million of these deaths happened before 70 years of age. Most of these deaths (82%) occurred in low and middle-income countries, where people are constantly eating processed and ultra-processed foods. In India, rates of

obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure are increasing along with the consumption of foods that are high in fat, sugar, and salt but low in health beneficial nutrients. This makes India an important place to study whether Ayurvedic food incompatibility can help explain the long-term harmful effects of such diets.

Viruddha Ahara also helps explain modern digestive disorders. Conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), lactose intolerance, and celiac disease can be seen as diseases where *Viruddha Ahara* can potentially act as a trigger factor. In IBS, foods that are high in fat act as triggers, similar to *Agni Viruddha* and wrong eating timing. In IBD, Westernised diets high in fat and processed foods worsen gut inflammation and bacteria imbalance, which matches the concept of *Viruddha Ahara* as a harmful dietary pattern. In people who cannot digest lactose or gluten, certain foods act as incompatible foods for their specific disease, causing immune reactions and gut damage.

The concept of *Viruddha Ahara* can be potentially used for its ability to foresee disease prevention. It helps us understand how repeated bad eating habits can lead to chronic diseases and can place undue stress on the liver and kidneys, even when no obvious poison is involved. This makes it extremely useful for doctors and dietitians while giving advice on diet, curating personalized nutrition plans, and designing research studies in Ayurveda and integrative medicine.

Therefore, *Viruddha Ahara* can potentially act as a link between Ayurveda, nutrition, gut health, and toxicology. Future research should focus on key concepts like:

- Creating clear, standard lists of incompatible foods from classical texts that also fit the modern dietary habits.
- Studying the biochemical mechanisms of specific food combinations that are widely used.
- Using gut microbiome testing to understand how incompatible foods might affect the beneficial bacteria.
- Conducting well-designed animal and human studies on specific food combinations.
- Conducting various interventional studies to evaluate the effect of Ayurvedic dietary guidelines in preventing diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

Such studies can help connect the ancient Ayurvedic wisdom of incompatible diet with modern dietary habits, and can help create a more complete, preventive, and culturally relevant approach to healthy eating in today's world of rising non-communicable diseases.

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