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Viruddha Ahara and its Role in Skin and Gastrointestinal Disorders: A Critical Review

Dr. Anand V. Kalaskar[1], Dr. Pooja P. Neel[2], Dr. Somesh G. Dalimkar[3]
[1] MD Kayachikitsa–Vikritivigyan, BHU
PG Diploma in Yoga, BHU; PG Diploma in Medico-Legal System, Symbiosis, Pune
[2] PG Scholar, Roganidana–Vikritivijnana, Sumatibhai Shah Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Hadapsar, Pune
[3] PG Scholar, Roganidana–Vikritivijnana, Sumatibhai Shah Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Hadapsar, Pune

Abstract : *Ayurveda considers Ahara a principal determinant of health and disease. The physiological effect of food depends not only on its individual qualities but also on its combination, quantity, processing, sequence of intake, time, season, digestive capacity and suitability to the individual. Food that becomes unwholesome because of incompatibility among these factors is described as Viruddha Ahara. Acharya Charaka states that incompatible food provokes the Doshas but does not expel them from the body. Repeated exposure may disturb Agni, produce Ama, impair Rasa Dhatu formation and cause Srotodushti. Skin and gastrointestinal disorders are repeatedly associated with incompatible dietary practices in classical Ayurvedic literature.*

Keywords: Viruddha Ahara, incompatible diet, Agni, Ama, Kushtha, Amlapitta, Grahani, skin disorders, gastrointestinal disorders.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda gives primary importance to Ahara in the maintenance of life, strength, complexion and health. Acharya Charaka considers food as one of the three supporting pillars of life, along with sleep and regulated conduct.

त्रयोपस्तम्भा इति—आहारः स्वप्नो ब्रह्मचर्यमिति। **Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 11/35**

A wholesome diet supports the equilibrium of Dosha, nourishment of Dhatu, proper formation of Mala, preservation of Ojas and maintenance of health. However, food does not produce its effects merely on the basis of its nutritional components. Its effects are also influenced by combination, quantity, processing, season, habitat, digestive capacity, sequence of eating and the individual's adaptation.

The term Viruddha means opposite, incompatible, obstructive or antagonistic. Acharya Charaka defines Viruddha Ahara as food or dietary substances that aggravate the Doshas but do not expel them from the body:

यत्किञ्चिद्दोषमास्राव्य न निर्हरति कायतः।

आहारजातं तत्सर्वमहितायोपपद्यते॥ **Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 26/85.**

Thus, Viruddha Ahara is not restricted to two food items consumed together. It encompasses incompatibility arising from place, season, dose, digestive capacity, processing, combination, sequence, rules of eating and the condition of the individual.

Acharya Charaka states that incompatible food may produce several disorders, including Visarpa, Shotha, Grahani, Amlapitta-like symptoms, skin disorders, abdominal distension, anaemia, fever, rhinitis, infertility and even death in severe circumstances. Skin and gastrointestinal disorders are particularly relevant because the gastrointestinal tract is the initial site of digestion, while the skin reflects disturbances involving Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa and Lasika Dhatus.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This work was conducted as a narrative and conceptual review of classical Ayurvedic literature.

The following texts were used as the principal sources:

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1. Charaka Samhita with Ayurveda-Dipika commentary of Chakrapanidatta.
2. Sushruta Samhita with Nibandha-Sangraha commentary of Dalhana.
3. Ashtanga Hridaya with Sarvanga-Sundara commentary of Arunadatta
4. Standard Ayurvedic textbooks and relevant review literature on Viruddha Ahara, Agni, Ama, Kushtha, Amlapitta and Grahani.

III. RESULTS

1. Definition of Viruddha Ahara

Viruddha Ahara may be understood as food that becomes unwholesome because of one or more of the following:

- Incompatible intrinsic qualities
- Improper combination
- Incorrect dose or proportion
- Unsuitable processing
- Consumption at an inappropriate time or season
- Incompatibility with digestive capacity
- Improper sequence of intake
- Incompatibility with the individual's adaptation or clinical condition

Acharya Vagbhata explains that substances which aggravate the Doshas but fail to expel them from the body are considered incompatible. The discussion occurs in the Anna Raksha chapter of Ashtanga Hridaya.

यत् किञ्चिद् दोषम् उत्क्लेश्य न हरेत् तत् समासतः ।

विरुद्धम् ॥ **Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 7/45**.

2. Types of Viruddha Ahara

Classical texts, such as the Charaka Samhita, categorize 18 types of Viruddha Ahara based on factors such as taste, potency, digestive processing, metabolic transformation, and inherent incompatibility.

1. **Desha Viruddha (place antagonistic):** Desha Viruddha refers to the consumption of substances that are unsuitable for a particular geographical region. For instance, consuming dry and acute substances in a Jangala Desha (arid region) is considered inappropriate. Similarly, the intake of unctuous and cold substances in Anoopa Desha (marshy regions) is also regarded as incompatible.
2. **Kala Viruddha (time antagonistic):** Time antagonistic refers to consuming food at an inappropriate time of the day or season. Hot and pungent foods are unsuitable in warm seasons, while cold and dry foods can be harmful in colder months.
3. **Agni Viruddha (digestive fire antagonistic):** When food is consumed without considering the strength of digestive fire (Agni), it results in improper digestion. Consuming Guru (heavy-to-digest) foods when digestive power is Mandagni (weak) or opting for Laghu (light) foods when digestion is excessively Tikshnagni (strong) can disrupt digestive balance.
4. **Matra Viruddha (quantity antagonistic):** Food that is antagonistic in terms of quantity, such as consuming honey and ghee in equal proportions.
5. **Satmya Viruddha (habituation antagonistic):** Food that is antagonistic with a person's habituation or adaptability, such as consuming sweet and cold substances by individuals habituated to pungent and hot foods.
6. **Dosha Viruddha (Doṣha antagonistic):** Food that is incompatible with the prevailing state of Doṣha.
7. **Sanskar Viruddha (processing antagonistic):** Drugs and diets prepared in a specific manner can have toxic effects, such as consuming peacock meat roasted on a castor spit and also heated honey produces toxins.
8. **Veerya Viruddha (potency antagonistic):** Combining foods of opposite potencies (Veerya) disrupts digestion.
9. **Koshtha Viruddha (bowel antagonistic):** Consuming substances unsuitable for bowel nature can be harmful. Mild purgatives may be ineffective for constipated bowels, while strong purgatives in excess can negatively

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affect soft bowels.

10. **Avastha Viruddha (condition antagonistic):** Consuming substances that oppose the body's state or condition can be harmful. For example, eating Vata-aggravating foods after physical exertion or Kapha-aggravating foods after sleep may disrupt doshic balance.
11. **Kram Viruddha (order antagonistic):** Consuming substances in an improper sequence can be harmful. Examples include eating curd at night, drinking hot water after honey, and eating without clearing the bowels and bladder.
12. **Parihar Viruddha (contra-indication antagonistic):** Neglecting necessary dietary restrictions. Examples include drinking cold water immediately after eating oily food, which solidifies fat and hinders digestion.
13. **Upachar Viruddha (treatment/indication antagonistic):** Consuming substances that counteract treatment can be harmful, such as eating cold foods after ghee or drinking hot water after honey.
14. **Paak Viruddha (cooking antagonistic):** Consuming improperly prepared food can be harmful. This includes food cooked with poor-quality or rotten fuel, as well as undercooked, overcooked, or burnt food.
15. **Samyoga Viruddha (combination antagonistic):** It refers to the consumption of incompatible food combinations that may have toxic effects. Examples include mixing sour substances with milk or combining milk with bananas or fruit salad.
16. **Hriday Viruddha (palatability antagonistic):** Any substance that is unpalatable or unpleasant in taste.
17. **Sampad Viruddha (richness antagonistic):** Incompatible due to quality imbalance, such as consuming substances that are immature, overripe, or spoiled.
18. **Vidhi Viruddha (eating rules antagonistic):** This refers to dietary practices that do not follow proper eating guidelines. An example includes consuming food in public or open places.

Acharya Sushruta elaborated on the concept of Viruddha Ahara.

1. **Samyoga Viruddha (combination antagonistic):** Some food items, when combined, exhibit toxic properties similar to poison (visha). For instance, the meat of animals dwelling in villages, marshy areas, or water bodies should not be consumed together with newly harvested grains, sprouted grains, muscle tissue, fat, honey, milk, jaggery, or black gram.
2. **Karma Viruddha (incompatibility due to action over time):** Certain food items, when stored or combined over time, develop harmful effects. For example, ghrita (ghee) stored in a bronze vessel for 10 days becomes toxic and should not be consumed.
3. **Mana Viruddha (incompatibility due to quantity):** Some food substances, though compatible in nature, can act like poison if consumed in particular proportions. For example, honey with water or honey with ghrita should not be taken in equal quantities.
4. **Rasa, Virya, Vipaka, and Viruddha (incompatibility in taste, potency, and post-digestive effect**): Some combinations are incompatible due to conflicting taste (rasa), potency (virya), and post-digestive effect (vipaka). For example, the combinations of madhura (sweet) with amla (sour) or lavana (salty) are considered incompatible.

V. GENERAL SAMPRAPTI OF VIRUDDHA AHARA-JANYA VYADHI

The general pathogenesis may be represented as follows:

Repeated consumption of Viruddha Ahara→ Vitiation of Tridosha, particularly Pitta and Kapha→ Impairment of Jatharagni→ Incomplete digestion and formation of Ama→ Rasa Dhatu Dushti→ Srotorodha and abnormal circulation of vitiated Doshas→ Khavaigunya in gastrointestinal tract or skin-related tissues→ Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana→ Manifestation of gastrointestinal or skin disease

This model indicates that Viruddha Ahara may act both as an immediate dietary irritant and as a cumulative cause of metabolic disturbance.

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VI. ROLE IN SKIN DISORDERS

6.1 Viruddha Ahara as a cause of Kushtha

Acharya Charaka includes incompatible dietary practices among the important causes of Kushtha. Dietary factors capable of simultaneously aggravating multiple Doshas and contaminating Rakta, Mamsa and Lasika are particularly emphasised.

चरक संहिता, सूत्रस्थान २५/४० (अग्र्यसंग्रह)

विरुद्धाशनं कुष्ठिनाम्।

Ayurveda considers Kushtha a disorder involving all three Doshas, with particular involvement of:

- Tvak—skin
- Rakta—blood tissue
- Mamsa—muscle tissue
- Lasika—lymph or tissue fluid

These are described as the principal Dushyas in Kushtha.

6.2 Viruddha Ahara and Visarpa

Visarpa is characterised by rapidly spreading inflammatory lesions. Acharya Charaka mentions dietary and behavioural factors that vitiate Dosha and Rakta in its causation. Since Viruddha Ahara can cause both Pitta–Rakta Dushti and systemic Ama, it may support the development of inflammatory and spreading skin manifestations.

प्रक्लिन्नानामसात्म्यानां विरुद्धानां च सेवनात्।
अत्यादानाद्दिवास्वप्नादजीर्णाध्यशनात् क्षतात्॥
क्षतबन्धप्रपतनाद्धर्मकर्मातिसेवनात्।
विषवाताग्निदोषाच्च विसर्पाणां समुद्भवः॥
एतैर्निदानैर्व्यामिश्रैः कुपिता मारुतादयः।
दूष्यान् संदूष्य रक्तादीन् विसर्पन्त्यहिताशिनाम्॥ **Charaka Samhita, Chikitsasthana 21—Visarpa Chikitsa.**

VII. ROLE IN GASTROINTESTINAL DISORDERS

7.1 Viruddha Ahara and Agnimandya

The gastrointestinal tract is the first system exposed to incompatible food. Food that is heavy, excessive, improperly processed, consumed at an unsuitable time or eaten before the previous meal is digested can impair Jatharagni.

7.2 Formation of Ama

When impaired Agni fails to digest food properly, partially processed material is produced. This is described as Ama. Ama has heavy, sticky and obstructive characteristics and can combine with aggravated Doshas. This causes:

- Heaviness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal discomfort
- Coated tongue
- Lethargy
- Constipation or abnormal bowel movements
- Foul-smelling stool
- Systemic manifestations

7.3 Viruddha Ahara and Ajirna

Ajirna results when consumed food is not digested adequately. Important contributing dietary practices include:

- Adhyashana—eating before the previous food is digested.
- Samashana—mixing wholesome and unwholesome foods.
- Vishamashana—eating at irregular times or in irregular quantities.
- Excessive intake of heavy, oily, cold or difficult-to-digest foods.

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- Improper combinations and processing.

Ajirna may be an early manifestation of dietary incompatibility and can subsequently progress to more persistent gastrointestinal disease.

7.4 Viruddha Ahara and Amlapitta

Amlapitta is primarily associated with vitiation of Pitta, especially when Amla and Drava qualities increase. Frequent intake of sour, fermented, spicy, excessively oily, stale and incompatible foods may impair digestion and aggravate Pitta.

7.5 Viruddha Ahara and Grahani Dosha

Grahani is functionally dependent on Agni. When Agni is weak, the capacity of Grahani to retain and process food is disturbed.

ग्रहण्याश्रितमग्निं तु ग्रहणी बलमाश्रिता।

The functional strength of Grahani depends upon Agni, and Agni is situated in relation to Grahani.

Repeated intake of incompatible foods may produce:

- Persistent Agnimandya
- Irregular digestion
- Passage of incompletely digested food
- Alternating loose and formed stools
- Abdominal pain
- Distension
- Loss of appetite
- Weakness and malnourishment

Thus, Viruddha Ahara may contribute to the initiation and chronicity of Grahani Dosha.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The review demonstrates that Viruddha Ahara is a comprehensive framework of dietary incompatibility. The classical account incorporates interactions between food, person and context. This makes it conceptually broader than modern food intolerance, food allergy, poisoning or drug–food interaction.

Viruddha Ahara is not always immediately poisonous

The classical definition suggests that incompatible food may provoke Doshas without expelling them. Its effects may therefore be: Immediate or delayed, Mild or severe, Local or systemic ,Reversible or persistent, Dependent on repeated exposure, Modified by Agni, Satmya and Bala Some examples may produce acute symptoms, while others may contribute gradually to chronic disease.

Three principal mechanisms emerge from the classical literature.

1. Agni impairment

Most gastrointestinal effects of incompatible food can be explained initially through Agnimandya. Improperly digested food produces abdominal heaviness, distension, altered bowel habits and loss of appetite. Persistent impairment affects the formation and nourishment of subsequent Dhatus.

2. Ama formation and Srotorodha

Ama produced through defective digestion may mix with aggravated Doshas. Its sticky and obstructive nature may cause Srotorodha, preventing normal transportation and tissue nutrition. This concept helps explain how an initial gastrointestinal disturbance may subsequently produce systemic manifestations.

3. Dosha and Dhatu vitiation

Skin disorders require localisation of aggravated Doshas in susceptible skin-related tissues. Viruddha Ahara can simultaneously disturb Pitta, Kapha, Rakta, Mamsa and Lasika. This may provide a conceptual explanation for chronicity, recurrence, altered complexion, itching, burning, discharge, dryness and scaling.

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IX. CONCLUSION

Viruddha Ahara is an extensive Ayurvedic concept describing incompatibility arising from food combination, proportion, processing, cooking, quality, timing, sequence, season, digestive capacity and individual suitability. It cannot be reduced to a fixed list of prohibited food pairs.

Repeated consumption may aggravate the Doshas, disturb Jatharagni, produce Ama and impair the formation of Rasa Dhatu. Subsequent Rakta, Mamsa, Lasika and Srotas involvement may contribute to gastrointestinal and skin disorders.

The gastrointestinal manifestations may include Ajirna, Amlapitta, abdominal distension and Grahani Dosha. Skin manifestations may arise through Tridosha Prakopa and vitiation of Tvak, Rakta, Mamsa and Lasika, forming the basis for Kushtha, Visarpa and related disorders.

Contemporary research into food processing, gut microbiota, intestinal permeability and the gut–skin axis provides plausible areas for scientific exploration. Nevertheless, modern findings do not yet validate every classical food combination or establish direct biomedical equivalents for Ama, Agni or Srotodushti.

The clinical use of this concept should therefore be individualised, nutritionally balanced and evidence-conscious. Carefully designed clinical, dietary and laboratory studies are needed to clarify its preventive and therapeutic importance.

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