

Review Article

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## A FOOD-BORNE TOXINS AND DIETARY POISONS: AYURVEDIC INSIGHTS INTO *VISHAKTA AHARA* AND *VIRUDDHA AHARA*

Dr. Shreyas Shrikrishna Joshi

Professor, Department of Agada Tantra, MES Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Ghanekhunt - Lote, Tal - Khed, Ratnagiri 415722

**Corresponding Author** - Dr. Shreyas Shrikrishna Joshi, Professor, Department of Agada Tantra, MES Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Ghanekhunt - Lote, Tal - Khed, Ratnagiri 415722

**Email id** : dr.shreyasjoshi@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Food safety and compatibility are central to both health promotion and disease prevention in *Ayurveda*. Concepts such as *Vishakta Ahara* (toxic food) and *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible food combinations) form a fundamental part of *Ayurvedic* dietetics and toxicology (*Agada Tantra*). These concepts provide a unique lens to understand food-borne toxins, chronic disorders, and metabolic disturbances resulting from inappropriate dietary practices. **Aim:** To explore classical *Ayurvedic* perspectives on *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* and evaluate their relevance in the context of modern food toxicology and dietary incompatibility. **Objectives:** To define and classify *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* based on classical texts. To examine the pathogenesis (*Samprapti*) caused by such dietary toxins. To correlate *Ayurvedic* insights with modern concepts of food poisoning, allergenicity, and food-drug interactions. To review preventive and therapeutic strategies for managing such dietary disorders. **Materials and Methods:** This is a qualitative, textual review based on primary classical *Ayurvedic* treatises including *Charaka Samhitā*, *Suśruta Samhitā*, *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*, and *Bhāvaprakāśa*, supported by secondary modern scientific literature on food toxicology. Comparative analysis is done to bridge traditional insights with modern

understanding of dietary poisons and their health impact. **Results:** Classical texts describe a wide array of incompatible food combinations and methods of food contamination, such as those caused by toxins, poor hygiene, or incorrect processing. These lead to systemic manifestations ranging from *Āma* formation to severe diseases including skin disorders, gastrointestinal disturbances, and autoimmune-like reactions. Modern parallels include allergic reactions, food-borne infections, and chemical food poisoning. Preventive measures like *Samskara* (processing), *Anupana* (appropriate adjuvants), and *Agni-bala* assessment are emphasized for safe dietary practices. **Conclusion:** *Ayurvedic* concepts of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* provide timeless and clinically relevant dietary principles. Integration of these principles with modern nutrition and food safety can contribute to a holistic framework for health promotion and dietary disease prevention.

**Keywords:** *Vishakta Ahara*, *Viruddha Ahara*, *Agada Tantra*, Dietary Poisons, Food Incompatibility, *Ayurvedic* Nutrition.

## INTRODUCTION

Diet plays a pivotal role in maintaining health and preventing disease, both in classical *Ayurveda* and modern medicine. *Ahara* (food) is regarded as *Mahabhaishajya* (the supreme medicine) in *Ayurveda*, and when consumed appropriately according to one's constitution (*Prakriti*), digestive power (*Agni*), season (*Ritu*), and compatibility (*Yogya*), it supports physical vitality and mental well-being.<sup>1</sup> However, when the same food becomes unsuitable due to contamination or incompatibility, it turns into a source of disease. This is where the concepts of *Vishakta Ahara* (toxic/contaminated food) and *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible food combinations) assume importance.<sup>2</sup>

*Vishakta Ahara* is primarily understood as food that has become toxic due to external or internal contamination—whether by microorganisms, environmental pollutants, improper cooking methods, or poor storage.<sup>3</sup> Classical *Ayurvedic* texts like *Charaka Samhitā* and *Suśruta Samhitā* categorize food poisoning under *Annarakta Visha* or *Ahara Janya Visha*, often resulting in symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, fever, and systemic toxicity. Such accounts bear remarkable resemblance to modern food-borne illnesses caused by bacterial toxins (e.g., *Salmonella*, *Clostridium botulinum*), mycotoxins, or chemical adulterants.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, *Viruddha Ahara* refers to food combinations that may not be toxic in isolation but produce adverse reactions when consumed together.<sup>5</sup> These include combinations like milk with fish, honey with ghee in equal proportion, or cold and hot potency foods taken simultaneously. The concept of *Viruddha Ahara* explains delayed hypersensitivity, metabolic disorders, chronic inflammation, and even autoimmune conditions in today's clinical framework. It highlights the subtle interactions between food substances that disturb the body's equilibrium when incompatible qualities are combined.<sup>6</sup>

Modern food science recognizes similar dangers in dietary incompatibilities through allergenic food reactions, histamine toxicity, enzyme suppression, and altered gut microbiota. Fast food culture, food preservatives, chemical-laced produce, and lack of seasonal and digestive alignment have made *Viruddha Ahara* and *Vishakta Ahara* common occurrences. *Ayurveda* not only identifies such risks but also prescribes specific methods for detoxification (*Shodhana*), digestive correction (*Dipana-Pachana*), and food harmonization through *Samskara* (processing), *Anupana* (adjuvants), and *Aharavidhi Vidhan* (dietary rules).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, this paper attempts to explore and critically analyze the foundational concepts of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* as delineated in *Ayurvedic* literature and correlate them with modern understandings of food toxicity and dietary disorders. By bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary science, a comprehensive dietary framework can be developed for preventive healthcare and rational dietary planning.<sup>8</sup>

## AIM AND OBJECTIVES

### Aim:

To explore *Ayurvedic* concepts of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* and analyze their relevance in modern food toxicology and dietary incompatibility.

### Objectives:

1. To define and classify *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* from classical *Ayurvedic* texts.
2. To study the pathological effects and clinical implications of such foods.
3. To correlate *Ayurvedic* dietary toxins with modern food-borne illnesses.
4. To highlight preventive and therapeutic measures mentioned in *Ayurveda*.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This study is a qualitative textual review based on classical *Ayurvedic* literature, including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hṛdaya*, *Bhavaprakāśa*, and other relevant treatises, focusing on descriptions of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara*. Secondary sources such as commentaries, peer-reviewed journals, and modern scientific literature on food toxicology and dietary incompatibilities were also consulted. The data were analyzed through thematic content analysis to identify parallels between *Ayurvedic* doctrines and contemporary understandings of food-borne toxins, food-drug interactions, and allergic responses.

## CONCEPTUAL STUDY

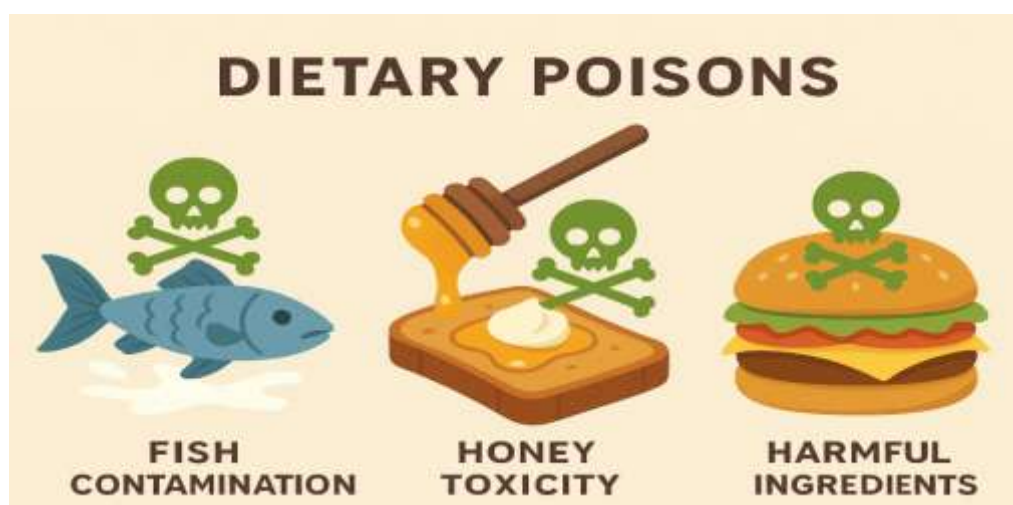


In Ayurveda, food is considered the foundation of health, and its quality, compatibility, and mode of intake play a vital role in maintaining homeostasis. The concept of *Ahara* is not limited to nutrition but extends to its potential to either sustain life or initiate disease when improperly consumed.<sup>9</sup> Two significant classifications of harmful food described in classical texts are *Vishakta Ahara* (toxic or contaminated food) and *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible food combinations). These concepts are addressed primarily in the context of *Agada Tantra* and *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*.<sup>10</sup>

*Vishakta Ahara* refers to food that becomes toxic due to contamination by physical, chemical, or microbial agents. As per *Charaka Samhita* and *Bhavaprakasha*, such food includes stale, spoiled, improperly stored, or insect-infested substances that can lead to symptoms resembling food poisoning. It also includes food prepared in unhygienic conditions, cooked

in toxic metals, or contaminated with poisonous substances (*Gara Visha*).<sup>11</sup> This food acts as a source of *Ama* (undigested toxins), which obstructs the physiological channels (*Srotas*) and leads to *Dosha* aggravation. Symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea, burning sensation, fever, headache, and in severe cases, convulsions and unconsciousness are described in association with *Vishakta Ahara*.<sup>12</sup>

*Viruddha Ahara*, on the other hand, is a unique contribution of Ayurveda to dietetics. It includes the consumption of food items which, when combined or taken in improper conditions (wrong time, quantity, or sequence), lead to harmful effects despite being wholesome individually.<sup>13</sup> There are various types of *Viruddha Ahara* classified in *Charaka Samhita*—such as *Desha Viruddha* (geographically incompatible), *Kala Viruddha* (seasonally incompatible), *Agni Viruddha* (contrary to digestive fire), *Matra Viruddha* (wrong quantity), *Sanskara Viruddha* (improper processing), *Veerya Viruddha* (opposing potencies), and *Samskara Viruddha* (inappropriate combination). Examples include the combination of milk and sour fruits, honey and ghee in equal quantity, or fish and milk. These combinations disturb the equilibrium of *Doshas* and may lead to disorders such as skin diseases, digestive disturbances, allergies, or chronic metabolic imbalances.<sup>14</sup>



The mechanism of action of *Viruddha Ahara* is described through the concept of *Viruddha Veerya*, where the antagonistic potency of combined substances leads to *Agni Dushti*, *Ama* formation, and *Srotorodha*.<sup>15</sup> It further leads to accumulation of metabolic byproducts and immune responses that manifest as disease. Modern parallels can be drawn to food intolerance, allergic reactions, gut dysbiosis, and toxin-mediated inflammation. Interestingly, *Viruddha Ahara* is also implicated in the origin of lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes,

infertility, and mental disturbances in Ayurveda.<sup>16</sup> Both *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* are said to impair *Agni*, the metabolic fire, which is central to all physiological functions.<sup>17</sup> Impaired *Agni* results in incomplete digestion and accumulation of *Ama*, which is considered the root of most diseases. The texts recommend several management strategies including *Shodhana* (detoxification), *Deepana Pachana* (enhancing digestive fire), and strict adherence to *Ahara Vidhi* (dietary rules). Additionally, *Anupana* (appropriate adjuvants), *Sanskara* (processing methods), and selection of food based on *Desha*, *Kala*, and *Prakriti* are emphasized to prevent dietary toxicity.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the conceptual foundation of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* reflects a highly evolved understanding of food safety, toxicity, and compatibility. These principles not only explain acute food-borne illnesses but also provide insight into the pathogenesis of chronic dietary diseases. Integrating this ancient wisdom with modern nutritional science may significantly improve public health outcomes and personalized diet planning.<sup>19</sup>

## RESULT AND FINDINGS

- *Vishakta Ahara* is described as food contaminated by toxins, microbes, or improper processing—linked to symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and toxicity.
- It correlates with modern food-borne diseases such as bacterial poisoning, mycotoxin exposure, and chemical adulteration.
- *Viruddha Ahara* includes over 18 types of incompatible food combinations (e.g., milk with fish, honey with ghee in equal amounts) described in classical texts.
- These combinations lead to *Agni Dushti*, *Ama* formation, and are associated with allergies, skin disorders, metabolic diseases, and autoimmune conditions.
- Ayurveda recommends preventive measures such as *Anupana*, *Sanskara*, *Ritucharya*, and *Prakriti-anukula Ahara* to avoid such dietary hazards.
- Therapeutic interventions include *Shodhana*, *Deepana-Pachana*, and the use of *Vishaghna* and *Agni-deepana* herbs.
- Both concepts remain highly relevant in modern times for food safety, diet planning, and public health nutrition.

## DISCUSSION

The foundational texts of Ayurveda emphasize the role of diet not only as nourishment but also as a potential cause of disease when taken inappropriately. The detailed delineation of

*Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* reflects the sophisticated understanding of food safety and dietary incompatibility in ancient times.<sup>20</sup> *Vishakta Ahara* corresponds well with the modern concept of food contamination and food-borne infections caused by bacteria, fungi, chemicals, or toxins. This shows that Ayurvedic seers were well aware of the potential dangers of improper food storage, unhygienic preparation, and toxic contamination.<sup>21</sup>

The concept of *Viruddha Ahara* is particularly unique to Ayurveda and finds no direct parallel in modern medicine, yet it aligns with several emerging scientific understandings. For example, food combinations that alter gut flora, interfere with digestion, or produce harmful metabolites can be considered modern equivalents of *Viruddha Ahara*.<sup>22</sup> Contemporary nutritional science is increasingly acknowledging the role of food synergy, dietary habits, and timing in the development or prevention of chronic diseases, echoing Ayurvedic principles laid down thousands of years ago.<sup>23</sup>

From a clinical standpoint, both *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* contribute to the formation of *Ama* and the aggravation of *Doshas*, leading to systemic disorders. Chronic intake of such foods may cause inflammatory responses, metabolic dysfunction, skin diseases, digestive disturbances, and even mental health disorders. This reflects a deep correlation between Ayurvedic and biomedical understanding of gut-mediated pathologies and food-related morbidity.<sup>24</sup>

Preventive measures highlighted in Ayurveda—such as proper food processing (*Sanskara*), consumption of adjuvants (*Anupana*), seasonal adaptation (*Ritucharya*), and dietary discipline (*Aharavidhi Vidhan*)—hold significant relevance today. They promote digestive health, enhance metabolic efficiency (*Agni*), and support immunity. Modern practices like personalized nutrition, food safety regulations, and clean eating trends resonate with these traditional strategies.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, integrating Ayurvedic dietary concepts with contemporary food science can enhance nutritional safety, reduce food-related diseases, and support holistic health. This discussion affirms that the principles of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* are not only ancient but also enduringly relevant, offering valuable insights for current public health policies, clinical dietetics, and personalized nutrition frameworks.<sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Ayurvedic concepts of *Vishakta Ahara* and *Viruddha Ahara* offer profound insights into

the toxic and incompatible effects of food, which align remarkably with modern understandings of food-borne illnesses, allergic reactions, and metabolic disturbances. These ancient principles highlight the critical importance of food quality, compatibility, and proper dietary habits in maintaining health and preventing disease. By integrating Ayurvedic dietary wisdom with contemporary nutrition and food safety practices, a more comprehensive and preventive approach to diet-related disorders can be achieved, contributing significantly to public health and personalized healthcare strategies.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST -NIL**

#### **SOURCE OF SUPPORT -NONE**

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