

CHHACHHIKĀ AND RASĀLĀ AS A COOLING AND DIGESTIVE BEVERAGE IN  
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## ABSTRACT

The traditional use of *Chhachhikā* (a thin form of buttermilk) as a summer beverage is deeply embedded in Indian culture and cuisine. However, a cursory interpretation of classical Ayurvedic references has led to the perception that buttermilk (*takra*) is contraindicated during the hot season. This article revisits such interpretations through a scriptural lens, clarifies the original context of classical prohibitions, and explores the transformative role of *saṃskāra* (processing) in rendering certain forms of buttermilk therapeutically appropriate, even in summer. Drawing upon authoritative Ayurvedic treatises such as *Charakasamhitā*, *Suśrutasamhitā* and *Bhāvaprakāśa*, the paper elucidates the rationale for the use of *Chhachhikā* as a light, cooling, and digestive beverage. *Chakrapāṇi* and *Dalhaṇa*, in their commentaries on the *Charaka* and *Suśruta Samhitās*, have frequently endorsed practices validated by the experience of senior physicians (*vṛddha-vaidya-vyavahāra-siddha*). When such practices also align with popular usage (*lokasiddha*) and are adapted through proper processing (*saṃskāra*) to suit place, time, and context, they gain full scriptural and practical acceptance.

**KEYWORDS:** *Rasālā*, *Chhachhikā*, *Śikharinī*, *Śrīkhaṇḍ*, *takra*, *saṃskāra* (processing), *lokasiddha* (popularly validated practice), *vṛddha-vaidya-vyavahāra-siddha*, *āhāra kalpanā* (dietary formulation).

## INTRODUCTION

In the current digital age, platforms like WhatsApp have facilitated the widespread exchange of ideas, including those related to *Ayurveda*. While this has enriched public discourse, it has also given rise to oversimplified or misinterpreted conclusions based on isolated verses. A recent instance involves the citation of a verse from *Suśrutasamhitā*, which cautions against the use of *takra* (buttermilk) during summer.

Some interpreted this to mean that buttermilk, in any form, is prohibited during summer. This article aims to critically assess such a conclusion and present a nuanced view supported by textual and rational arguments.

## Contextual Understanding of the Prohibition

It is essential to note that the verse "नैव तक्रं क्षते..." is originally from *Suśrutasamhitā*, merely quoted in other books. The context refers to the use of *takra* in specific pathological conditions such as ulcers (*kṣata*), debility (*durbala*), unconsciousness (*mūrccā*), vertigo (*bhrama*), burning sensation (*dāha*), and disorders of *raktapitta-roga*.<sup>[1]</sup>

The clause "उष्णकाले" (in summer and sharat) appears among these contraindications, but classical commentaries do not impose a blanket prohibition on *takra* during these seasons. Instead, the suitability of *takra* depends on its preparation and the condition of the individual.

Role of *Saṃskāra* (Processing) in Qualitative Transformation

The concept of *saṃskāra* (processing) in Ayurveda plays a central role in altering the inherent properties of a substance.

In *Charakasamhitā karaṇa* (*saṃskāra*, processing) is defined as the deliberate transformation of natural substances through various methods such as boiling, churning, purification, seasoning, and exposure to specific environments.<sup>[2]</sup> This allows for the induction of new or modified therapeutic properties, making previously contraindicated substances suitable for particular uses.

### Five Forms of *Takra*: Taxonomy and Properties

*Bhāvamiśra*, in the *Bhāvaprakāśa-nighaṇṭu*, provides a detailed classification of five types of processed *Takra* based on preparation techniques.<sup>[3]</sup>

These are

1. **Ghola** – Churned curd without water, with cream retained.

• **Properties of Ghola**

*Ghola*, when mixed with sugar, should be understood to possess qualities similar to those of *Rasālā*. It (*Ghola*) pacifies *Vāta* and *Pitta* and induces a sense of contentment.

2. **Mathita** – Curd churned without water, with cream removed is *Mathita*.

**Properties of Mathita**- It is *kapha*- and *pitta*-*shāmaka* (alleviates *Kapha* and *Pitta*).<sup>[4]</sup>

3. **Takra** – Curd mixed with one-fourth water and churned called *Takra*.

### Properties of *Takra*

It possesses *kaṣāya* (astringent), *amla* (sour), and *madhura* (sweet) tastes, with *madhura vipāka* (post-digestive sweet effect). It is *grāhī* (absorptive, stool-binding), *laghu* (light to digest), *uṣṇa-vīrya* (having hot potency), *agni-dīpaka* (digestive power stimulant), *vīrya-vardhaka* (potency enhancer), *tṛptikara* (satiating), and *vātanaśaka* (destroyer of *Vāta*).

It is wholesome (*pathya*) for individuals suffering from *grahaṇī* and related disorders due to its lightness and absorbent (*saṅgrāhī*) properties. Moreover, because of its sweet post-digestive effect (*madhura-vipāka*), it does not aggravate *pitta*.

Moreover, its *amla rasa* (sour taste), *uṣṇa vīrya*, and *dīpana* (digestive stimulant) properties make it a *vṛṣya* (potency enhancer), *prasādana* (pleasure-giving), *tṛpti-prada* (satiating), and *vātaghna* (*Vāta*-pacifying) substance. *Takra*, by virtue of its *kaṣāya rasa*, *uṣṇa vīrya*, *vikāṣī* (spreading/penetrating), and *rūkṣa* (dry) nature, becomes *kapha-hara* (*Kapha*-reducing)<sup>5</sup>. (In this way, *Takra* has the potential to alleviate all three *doṣas*).

*Ācārya Caraka* has regarded *takra* (buttermilk) as the most excellent wholesome food and as a medicine in *grahaṇīdoṣa* (malabsorption syndrome). Presenting this logically, he describes it as *tridoṣaghna* (pacifying all three *doṣas*).

*Takra* (buttermilk), due to its properties of kindling digestive power (*dīpana*), astringency (*grāhī*), and lightness (*lāghava*), is highly beneficial in *grahaṇīdoṣa* (malabsorption syndrome).

It is considered the best because of its sweet post-digestive effect (*madhuravipāka*) and does not aggravate *pitta*.

Due to its astringent taste, warmth, expansive nature, and dryness, it is beneficial in *kapha* disorders. In *vāta* disorders, its sweet, sour, and unctuous nature makes it immediately effective and non-irritating (non-burning) to the gut when freshly prepared.<sup>[6]</sup>

But, the *Ācārya* further adds, these properties apply only to freshly churned *takra*. Clarifying this, the commentator *Cakrapāṇi* explains.

Because of its sweet post-digestive effect (*madhurapākitva*), it does not aggravate *pitta*; although its sourness (*amlatva*) would typically aggravate *pitta*, the sweetness in the post-digestive phase prevents this. However, it does not pacify *pitta* either.

'*Sadyaskamavidāhi*' means that freshly churned *takra* is not causing a burning sensation during digestion; but if it is kept for some time, it indeed becomes *vidāhī* (irritating or burning to the gut).<sup>[7]</sup>

*Bhāvamiśra*, acknowledging its usefulness in various disorders, further states that.

A person who consumes *Takra* is never afflicted by disease, and diseases that have been cured with *Takra* do not recur. Just as *Amṛta* (nectar) is blissful for the gods, *Takra* is considered equally blissful for humans on earth.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Udaśvit** – Curd mixed with half water and churned.

### Properties of *Udaśvit*

It is ***kapha*-provoking, strength-giving**, and mainly known to **destroy *āma*** (undigested metabolic toxins).

### *Chhachhikā*

Curd with cream removed, diluted with abundant water, it is called *Chhachhikā*.

### Properties of *Chhachhikā*

*Chhāchha* or *Chhachhikā* is cooling, light to digest, *pitta*-pacifying, and alleviates fatigue and thirst. It is also *vātaghna* and *kaphaghna*. If *Saindhava-lavaṇa* (rock salt) is added to it, it becomes a *dīpana* (digestive stimulant).

All these properties have been described collectively in the classical text *Bhāvaprakāśa Nighaṇṭu*.<sup>[9]</sup>

*Chhachhikā*: The Ideal Summer Beverage.

Among these, *Chhachhikā* stands out as particularly suitable for summer due to its lightness, cooling potency, and ability to mitigate thirst, fatigue, and *pitta*. This form of buttermilk is recognized by *Suśruta* as a derivative of *takra*.

*Achary Sushruta* says that which, through churning, becomes separated from its fat content, contains half its volume as water, is neither too thick nor too fluid, and has a taste that is sweet, slightly sour, and astringent —

that is called *takra* (buttermilk). But when the churning does not remove the fat and no water is added, the product is called *ghola*.<sup>[10]</sup>

This verse distinguishes *ghola* and *takra* based on their fat and water content. *Chhachhikā*, being extremely dilute and devoid of fat, aligns with Ayurvedic principles of a summer-appropriate diet.

### Churning-Induced Transformation

The primary form of curd, even without the addition of water or any other substance, undergoes a change in its qualities merely by the process of churning. This is referred to as *saṃskāra* (processing or modification) of substances. Through *saṃskāra*, a substance acquires new or altered properties. In Ayurveda, from a technical perspective, *saṃskāra* is termed as *karaṇa*. This *karaṇa* or *saṃskāra* can be performed in various ways.<sup>[11]</sup>

*Chakrapāṇi*, the commentator of *Charaka Saṃhitā*, has elaborated on the individual forms of these processing methods such as contact with water (*toya*), fire (*agni*), purification (*śauca*), churning (*manthana*), spatial and temporal factors (*deśa, kāla*), infusion (*vāsana*), mental processing (*bhāvanā*), etc., and has provided examples for each. Among these, he has also analyzed the *manthana-saṃskāra* (churning as a process of transformation).

Ordinarily, curd should not be used in conditions involving *śotha* (inflammation or swelling), as it tends to produce or aggravate such conditions. However, when curd is churned, this specific property gets modified.<sup>[12]</sup>

This means that the process of churning (*manthana*), even when performed without removing the fatty content (*sneha*), causes a qualitative transformation in the substance. Using curd as an example, it is explained that while curd generally causes inflammation,<sup>[9]</sup> when it is churned, it becomes capable of alleviating inflammation instead.

The preparation referred to here, *ghola*, is one such churned product. It is particularly suited for consumption during the summer season. When mixed with ingredients like *mishri* (rock sugar), cumin seeds, rock salt (*sendhava lavaṇa*), etc., its qualities are further enhanced. Although the classical *Ācāryas* have prohibited the use of curd during *Grīṣma ritu* (the summer season), curd that has been processed in this manner—through churning—becomes *tarpaṇa* (nourishing and hydrating), and thus is not forbidden in that season.

This is why people in North India traditionally consume *ghola*, commonly known as salty lassi or sweet lassi, especially during the summer months.

### Analytical Commentary

The concept of *saṃskāra* (transformation or processing) occupies a central role in Ayurvedic pharmaceutics and dietetics, signifying the dynamic nature of substances and their interaction with external stimuli such as heat, time, space, and mechanical actions like churning. The classical passage from *Charaka Saṃhitā* and its interpretation by *Chakrapāṇi* clearly emphasize that substances are not static in their properties; rather, they undergo substantial qualitative changes based on the method of preparation, a view that aligns with modern understandings of food chemistry and pharmacodynamics.

The transformation of curd through *manthana* (churning) into a lighter, inflammation-reducing form is particularly noteworthy. Curd, in its raw form, is classified as *śothakṛt* (inflammation-producing) and is traditionally contraindicated in inflammatory disorders and during the summer season due to its heaviness, stickiness (*picchila*), and tendency to aggravate *Kapha* and *Pitta*. However, when curd is subjected to *manthana*, even without removing its fat content, it becomes *śothaghna* (anti-inflammatory).

This transition underscores the doctrinal foundation of *Ayurveda* where the processing method is as significant as the substance itself.

The example of *ghola*—a churned curd beverage—is a practical expression of this principle. Its popular use in North India during summer as *meethī* or *namkīn lassi* (sweet or salty lassi) is not merely a cultural habit but is supported by textual tradition and rational understanding of seasonal physiology. When fortified with digestive and cooling adjuncts such as cumin, rock salt, and *mishri*, *ghola* becomes suitable even in seasons where curd is otherwise contraindicated, fulfilling the principles of *ṛtucaryā* (seasonal regimen) and *yuktiviśeṣa* (individualized rational application).

From a research perspective, this invites interdisciplinary exploration across traditional Ayurvedic processing techniques and modern nutritional biochemistry. The modification of lipid profile, protein structure, and microbial content through churning could provide biochemical correlates to the observed reduction in inflammatory potential. Furthermore, this challenges the reductionist approach that labels foods based only on their primary components, underscoring the *Ayurvedic* view that *dravyaguṇa* (substance properties) are mutable and contextual.

Thus, this classical example reaffirms the necessity of studying *saṃskāra*-based transformations not only as textual assertions but as testable hypotheses that bridge classical *Ayurvedic* wisdom with contemporary scientific paradigms.

**Lokasiddha (Popularly Validated) Use of Chhachhikā**

Both *Chakrapāṇi* and *Dalhaṇa*, in their commentaries on the *Charaka Samhitā* and *Suśruta Samhitā* respectively, have acknowledged various practices as being validated by the experience of senior physicians (*vṛddha-vaidyavyavahāra-siddha*) at multiple places.<sup>[13]</sup> Therefore, when a practice validated by public usage (*lokasiddha*) is further supported by the experiential authority of elder physicians, it is always accepted as valid. Many formulations of medicines or dietary preparations are refined and rendered beneficial through specific processes (*saṃskāra*) adapted to the context of place, time, and condition.

The repeated and beneficial use of *Chhachhikā* in Indian households during summer further reinforces its appropriateness. In Ayurvedic epistemology, practices validated by long-standing popular usage are termed *lokasiddha*. In common practice, it is frequently observed that in North India, people consume buttermilk (*chhāch*) in substantial quantities during the summer season. This helps relieve the effects of the sun's intense heat, such as dehydration and excessive thirst, and also provides a sense of satisfaction.

However, the *Ācāryas* have prohibited the use of *takra* during the summer season, that is, in hot weather. The confusion arises from the fact that some experts commonly interpret *takra* as buttermilk (*chhāch*) in Hindi, leading even some physicians to become misled. As a result, many *Ayurvedic* practitioners can be heard stating that *tare* should not be used during summer. But if one studies the scriptures carefully, it becomes clear that while *takra* is indeed contraindicated in summer, *chhāch* has been described as beneficial. Therefore, practices that are widely accepted and prevalent in public usage are indeed aligned with the *śāstra* and supported by Ayurvedic principles — they simply need to be understood with due seriousness.

This shows how *Ayurveda* allows the integration of popular practices when they are effective and non-harmful.

**Rasālā.**

*Ācārya Charaka* says that *Rasālā* is nourishing (*bṛṃhaṇī*), aphrodisiac (*vṛṣyā*), unctuous (*snigdha*), strength-promoting (*balyā*), and appetite-stimulating (*rucipradā*).<sup>[14]</sup>

*Rasālā* is an ancient traditional beverage or semi-solid preparation, also known as *Śikharinī*.<sup>[15]</sup> One of its forms closely resembles the modern-day *Śrīkhaṇḍ*. It is considered suitable for consumption during the summer season. Although it deserves a separate detailed discussion, it may briefly be stated here that *Śrīkhaṇḍ*, as commonly consumed in summer, is essentially a form of *Rasālā*. While plain curd is generally contraindicated in summer according to *Ayurvedic* principles, *Śrīkhaṇḍ*—a sweetened and cooled semi-solid dish prepared from

curd—is an exception due to its altered properties, making it more agreeable and refreshing during the hot season.

**CONCLUSION**

- A scriptural and rational analysis clearly establishes that the consumption of buttermilk—specifically *Chhachhikā* and *Rasālā*—is not contraindicated in summer when properly processed and contextually used. Classical texts not only permit but also endorse their usage under appropriate preparation. Hence, the categorical rejection of *takra* in summer misrepresents the nuanced, context-driven wisdom of *Ayurveda*. Rather than generalizing based on isolated verses, a comprehensive approach rooted in *saṃskāra*, *doṣa-prakṛti*, and seasonal context is essential for accurate *Ayurvedic* dietary application.

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