

ii. Āyurveda and various schools

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Introduction

- The origins of Āyurveda trace back to the **Vedic period**, where early references in the Atharva Veda laid the groundwork for a sophisticated medical system.
- Over centuries, knowledge was **transmitted** and refined through **lineages** (paramparā) and **schools** (sampradāyas). These schools specialized in different facets of healthcare, leading to the development of distinct texts, commentaries, and **branches** (aṣṭāṅga) of Āyurveda.

Two Major Classical Schools

Ātreya School (Medical Tradition)

1. **Founder/Patron:**
 - Rooted in the teachings of **Ātreya Punarvasu**, a legendary sage and physician.
 - His disciples included **Agniveśa**, Bhela, Jatūkarṇa, and Harita, who composed the earliest known treatises (later expanded or redacted into **Caraka Saṃhitā**, **Bhela Saṃhitā**, etc.).
2. **Focus:**
 - **Kāya Chikitsā** (internal medicine) was the primary emphasis—diagnosis, pathology, and medical therapeutics for systemic diseases.
 - Stress on **clinical examination**, tri-doṣa theory, dietetics, pharmacology, and preventive measures.
3. **Key Texts:**
 - **Agniveśa Tantra** (now lost in its original form), redacted by **Caraka** into the famous **Caraka Saṃhitā**.
 - **Bhela Saṃhitā**, **Harita Saṃhitā** (in fragments).
4. **Historical Impact:**
 - Shaped the foundational concepts of **Ayurvedic pathology**, **diagnosis**, and **medicinal formulations**.
 - The **Caraka Saṃhitā** remains a cornerstone for **Ayurvedic internal medicine** worldwide.

Dhanvantari School (Surgical Tradition)

1. **Founder/Patron:**
 - Linked to **Lord Dhanvantari**, revered as the **deity of medicine and surgery**.
 - **Suśruta** is the most prominent representative, credited with systematically codifying **surgical techniques**.
2. **Focus:**
 - **Śalya Tantra** (surgery) was the core discipline—covering diverse procedures from **incision**, **excision**, **suturing**, to advanced reconstructive surgeries (skin grafts, rhinoplasty).
 - Detailed anatomical studies via **cadaver dissection**, marma (vital points) analysis, and specialized surgical instruments.
3. **Key Text:**
 - **Suśruta Saṃhitā**, which meticulously describes operative procedures, instruments, bandaging, fractures, and marma therapy.
4. **Historical Impact:**
 - Influenced **global surgery** by introducing methods like **rhinoplasty** and precise **surgical classification**.
 - Emphasis on **practical training**, dissection, and post-operative care established a strong tradition of **Ayurvedic surgical excellence**.

Emergence of Aṣṭāṅga (Eight Branches) Ayurveda

While the Ātreya and Dhanvantari schools laid the foundation, Ayurveda soon branched into eight specialized fields (aṣṭāṅga):

1. **Kāya Chikitsā** (Internal Medicine)
2. **Śalya Tantra** (Surgery)
3. **Śālākya Tantra** (ENT & Ophthalmology)
4. **Kaumāra Bhṛtya** (Pediatrics/Obstetrics)
5. **Bhūta Vidyā** (Psychiatry/Demonology in ancient context)
6. **Agada Tantra** (Toxicology)
7. **Rasāyana** (Rejuvenation & Anti-aging)
8. **Vājikaraṇa** (Aphrodisiacs & Reproductive Health)

Key Points:

- Although the Ātreya and Dhanvantari lineages primarily addressed **internal medicine** and **surgery**, the expanded eightfold classification shows how **specialized schools** of thought grew around each domain.
- This diversification allowed in-depth exploration of **pediatrics**, **toxicology**, **mental health**, and more.

Further Schools and Commentators

Vāgbhaṭa School

- **Vāgbhaṭa I & II** produced seminal works:
 - **Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha**
 - **Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya**
- Integrated **Caraka** and **Suśruta** teachings into a **concise** format, popular among practitioners.
- Strengthened the concept of Aṣṭāṅga and unified earlier schools' approaches.

Other Specialized Traditions

1. **Kāśyapa Saṃhitā** School (Kaumāra Bhṛtya)
 - Centered on **pediatrics**, **gynecology**, **obstetrics**.
 - Authored or attributed to sage **Kāśyapa**—though much of this text is partially lost.
2. **Mādhubala Nidāna** School
 - Pioneered **diagnostics** (**nidāna**), focusing on systematic classification of diseases and their etiopathogenesis.
 - Influenced subsequent diagnostic paradigms.
3. **Yoga-Ayurveda Congruence**
 - **Yoga** and **Ayurveda** share Vedic roots and complement each other. Various yoga schools (e.g., Patañjali's) integrate with Ayurvedic principles for **holistic** therapy.

Medieval and Later Developments

- Post-7th century CE, Ayurvedic knowledge was consolidated via **commentaries** and **compendia** (e.g., Śārṅgadhara, Bhāvaprakāśa).
- Various **regional schools** emerged (e.g., Kerala's tradition specializing in **Pañcakarma**, Kerala-specific therapies like Dhāra, Pizhichil, Navarakizhi).
- Influence of **Tibetan**, **Persian**, and **Greek** medicine led to **syncretic practices** and translations (e.g., Unani influence in some Indian regions).



Modern Perspective: Unity and Diversity

1. Contemporary Institutions

- Institutes across India follow a **unified curriculum** blending Caraka-Suśruta-Vāgbhaṭa teachings, but some **regional lineage-based nuances** persist (e.g., certain paramparā focusing on bone-setting, marma therapy, or pharmacopeia).

2. Revival and Global Spread

- In modern times, there is a resurgence of interest in **Ayurvedic integrative medicine**, with schools offering specialized training in panchakarma, rasāyana, marma, etc.
- Ayurvedic concepts are **adapted** in clinics worldwide, fostering new schools of **applied Ayurveda**.

Conclusion

- The **core** of Āyurveda stems from **two principal schools**: Ātreyā (internal medicine) and Dhanvantari (surgery). Over centuries, these lineages inspired **eight specialized branches** (aṣṭāṅga) and further sub-lineages.
- Renowned **textual traditions** (Caraka, Suśruta, Vāgbhaṭa, Kāśyapa, Mādhaba, etc.) reflect **diverse focuses**—ranging from pediatrics and surgery to toxicology and mental health.
- As these classical schools evolved and integrated influences from **regional, cultural, and philosophical** fronts, Āyurveda became a **pluralistic science**—embracing multiple methods yet unified by its fundamental principles of **holistic well-being** (śarīra-manasa-ātma).

Key Takeaway

Āyurveda's major schools—Ātreyā for internal medicine and Dhanvantari for surgery—laid a **foundational dichotomy** that blossomed into the full spectrum of the **eight branches** of Ayurvedic practice. Through the works of Vāgbhaṭa, Kāśyapa, and others, these traditions have seamlessly **merged** into a **comprehensive system** still revered and practiced globally for its integrative, person-centered approach.