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## Literary review of *Marma Chikitsa*

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### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of holistic medicine and well-being, has been meticulously passed down through generations by Indian sages. Among the invaluable aspects of Ayurveda bestowed upon us by these revered *Acharyas* is the *Marma* science. Although not highly advanced in the context of modern science, *Marma* science emphasizes crucial points on the body surface known as *Marmas*. The occurrence of an injury at these vital points can potentially lead to disability, dysfunction, or even the termination of life. Intriguingly, *Marmas* serve as pivotal junctures where the entire spectrum of our physical and mental energy can be intentionally heightened, diminished, or redirected, facilitating transformative effects through the judicious application of *Marma* techniques. Considered as specialized pranic switches within the body, stimulating *Marma* points can lead to the balanced flow of *Prana* (life force) in different body parts, thereby yielding the desired therapeutic benefits. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of *Marmas*, offering a general description and highlighting the utility of *Marma Chikitsa* in promoting overall well-being.

**Key words:** Ayurveda, Marma, Pranic, Prana, Marma Chikitsa

### INTRODUCTION

*Marma* Science is one of the oldest medical science for prevention and cure of diseases, promotion of health and calmness of mind, as well as development of self-healing capabilities. It is extremely effective and acts very rapidly, yet, because of the fact that improper intervention at the *Marma* sites can even be fatal, its use as a therapeutic procedure, by directly stimulating or affecting the *Marma* points, was not very common<sup>[1]</sup>

and was limited to some specific traditions and practices. *Marma* Therapy as a natural, non-invasive, instant and permanent method of healing.

Dr. Sunil Kumar Joshi<sup>[1-3]</sup> has developed a simple methodology of stimulating the *Marma* points, and has successfully used this technique for providing relief in chronic disorders like scoliosis, cervical spondylosis, muscular dystrophy, prolapse inter vertebral disc, etc. Pathak (2015)<sup>[4]</sup> used this technique for the treatment of cervical spondylosis, and observed significant therapeutic benefits.

The National Health Portal of India<sup>[5]</sup> describes *Marma* Therapy as an important Ayurvedic treatment, wherein the pressure applied on the *Marmas* causes the vital energy (*Prana*) to flow along subtle channels (*Nadis*); this portal mentions the application of *Marma* Therapy for the management of several diseases, which include paralysis, sciatic pain, migraine, tremors, diabetic neuropathy, trigeminal neuralgia, facial or Bell's palsy, lumbar spondylitis, cervical spondylitis, frozen shoulder, carpal tunnel syndrome, muscular and joint pain, etc.

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*Marmas* are the seats of *Prana* (vital life force), i.e. the subtle energy centres where the *Prana* resides and flows;<sup>[6]</sup> *Prana* - The essential life energy, controls all of a living thing's subtle and physical functions.

## HISTORICAL REVIEW

The development of this science took place from *Saraswati* culture to the time period of *Charaka*. *Sushruta*, *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*

### In Veda

The first references to *Marma* in the Rig-Veda speak of using *Varma* or protective coverings to protect these *Marmas*. It refers to prayer or *Mantra (Brahman)* as the best protection (*Varma*) for these *Marmas*, showing a spiritual view behind the use of *Marmas* from the very beginning.<sup>[7]</sup>

Originally *Marma* was part of Vedic martial arts or *Dhanur Veda*, which is one of the four *Upavedas* or secondary *Vedas*.<sup>[8]</sup>

First time, the term *Marma* is described in *Atharvaveda*. During the Vedic period, knowledge of *Marma* was known by kings and warriors.<sup>[9]</sup>

### In Mahabharata

We find many references for *Marma* or *Varman*. It is interesting that there are references of protective clothing's of the *Marmas* of the elephants and horses also.

### In Ramayana

Subject *Marma* has been mentioned in epics too e.g. *Ramayana*.

1. An incident of injury to the vital part of the *Ravana* by the lord *Rama* is mentioned in by Sri *Goswami Tulshidasji* in *Ramayan*.<sup>[10]</sup>
2. Syncope of *Laxman*, younger brother of Lord *Ram*, on the battle field is worth remembering.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Arthashastra of Kautilya

It mentioned the use of arrowheads made up of metal and some protective instruments against the injury to *Marmas*.

The instructions are available regarding *Marma* to the Victorian persons. The kings of that time asked to keep

their vital parts protected with '*Kavacha*', a kind of protector.<sup>[12]</sup>

### Siddha System

It also refers to certain vital points and the effects of phases of moon and other planets on the human body.

### Charaka Samhita

*Acharya Charaka*, emphasized on *Marma Vigyan*. A separate chapter is devoted for the *Marma Vigyan*. Concept of *Tri Marma-Tripod* of life has been given by *Acharya Charaka*.<sup>[13]</sup>

### Sushruta Samhita

*Acharya Sushruta* (400-600 B.C), has described 107 body *Marma* in a separate chapter.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Ashtanga Samhita

*Acharya Vagbhata* in *Ashtang Sangraha* mentioned that, *Marma* points are the places where injury can lead to different kinds of pain and tremors.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Genesis of Marma (Etymology)

The term *Marma* is etymologically derived from *Sanskrit* root word '*Mri (Ek)*' which represents the sense of vital part of the body.

#### 1. Shabdakalpadruma

मृ + सर्वधातुभ्यो ऽमनिन् । (शब्द कल्पद्रुम 641)

According to the *Shabdakalpadruma*, the word *Marma* is derived from '*Mri*' *Dhatu*, which denotes *Sandhistanam* (i.e. joining place of various structures).<sup>[16]</sup>

#### 2. Shabdostam

मृ-मनिन् जीवस्थाने, सन्धि स्थाने, तात्पर्ये च । (शब्दोस्तम)

It is a first singular form of the word *Marman*, which is often used in the sense of *Jeevsthan* (seat of life), *Sandhistan* and *Tatparya*.

#### 3. Halayudha Kosha

मृ+ सर्व धातुभ्योऽमनिन्इति मनिन् । सन्निपातः शिरास्नायुसन्धिमासंस्थि सम्भवः । (हलायुध कोष 518)

*Halayudh Kosha* recognized it in the sense of *Jeevsthan* (seat of life) jointly represented the juncture of *Sira* (veins), *Snayu* (nerves), *Sandhi* (joints), *Mamsa* (muscles) and *Asthi* (bones).

#### 4. Amarakosha

मृ - मिनिनि, मृ+ प्राणत्यागे (*Amarakosha* 3/5/30)

According to the *Amarakosha*, the term *Marma* is derived from the sanskrit term 'Mri- Manin' or 'Mri-Pranatyage'. It means that 'which causes death'.

#### 5. According to Dalhana

मारयन्तीति मर्माणि

Injuries to 'Marmas' are likely to result fatal.

#### 6. According to Vriddha Vagabhata (Astang Sangraha)

अपि च मरणकारित्वान्मर्म

Which leads to or causes death

7. *Arundatta in Saravanga Sundari* derives the word from the root 'mring' meaning one which causes death.

#### Importance of Marma<sup>[17]</sup>

*Acharya Sushruta* has mentioned the detail description about *Marma* in the sixth chapter of *Shareer Sthan*. *Marma* is considered as an important part in the *Shalya Tantra* (Surgery) and cover the half subject of *Shalya Tantra* (Surgery).

मर्माणि शल्यविषयार्थमुदाहरन्ति (Su.Sha. 6/35)

*Marma* is the centre, where *Prana* or vital force of the body is situated.<sup>[18]</sup>

#### Structure and composition of Marma

मर्माणि पंचात्मकानि भवन्ति<sup>[19]</sup>

The *Marmas* are made up of *Dwadash Prana-*

1. *Soma* (*kapha* or watery elements)
2. *Maruta* (*vayu* or airy elements)
3. *Teja* (*pitta* or fiery elements)
4. *Satwa*

5. *Raja*

6. *Tama*

7-11. *Bhuta* (5 basic elements of creation, *Agni*, *Aakash*, *Vayu*, *Prithvi*, *Jala*.)

12. *Atma* (soul)

All of the aforementioned components that make up a *Marmas* are referred to as *Pranas*, or life elements. Some or all of these *Pranas* will become afflicted when any of the *Marma* or *Marmas* are harmed, resulting in deformity or death.

Furthermore, it has already been established that the structural components of *Marmas* are:

*Mamsa*, *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Asthi* and *sandhi*.

#### Definitions of Marma

##### 1. According to Acharya Sushruta

मर्माणि मांससिरास्नाय्वस्थिसन्धिसन्निपाताः; तेषु स्वभावत एव विशेषेण प्राणास्तिष्ठन्ति; तस्मान्मर्मस्वभिहतास्तास्तान् भावानापद्यन्ते।। (Su.Sha.6/16)

*Marma* points are the junction of five anatomical structures i.e. *Mamsa* (muscle), *Sira* (vessels), *Snayu* (ligament and nerve), *Asthi* (bone), and *Sandhi* (joints). Stimulation of *Marma* points optimises *Prana Vayu* and maintains equilibrium of *Doshas*.<sup>[20]</sup>

*Sushruta* was the first surgeon, who dissected and studied human body. He was able to describe all structures of human body like layers of skin, bones, cartilages, ligaments, muscles, arteries and veins.<sup>[21]</sup> After understanding all parts including minute structure and function of organs, he insisted to study the *Marmavigyan*.

##### 2. According to Acharya Charaka

हृदयमून्विस्तो च नृणां प्राणाः प्रतिष्ठिताः ।

तस्मात्तेषां सदा यत्नं कुर्वीत पारिपालने ।। (च०सि०9/9)

*Charakacharya* describes *Marma* as seat of *Chetana* and intensity of pain will be more compared to other parts of body if trauma or disease occurs. *Charaka* describes *Marma* as the centres of *Chaithanya*. So *Peeda* in

*Marmasthana* (functional abnormality) of these centres will be more severe when compared to other parts.<sup>[22]</sup>

### 3. According to Acharya Vagbhata

*Vagbhata* says that, these are the points which are painful on application of pressure and abnormal pulsation. *Marmas* are the areas where *Dhamani* come together along with other structures - *Mamsa*, *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Asthi* and *Sandhi*.

In *Ashtanga Hridaya* and *Astanga Sangraha* it is mentioned in *Shareerasthana Vagbhata* tells that wherever irregular pulsation and pain felt on pressure or trauma that location can be called as *Marma*.<sup>[23]</sup> *Marma* is an indication of the underlying pathophysiological changes as a result of trauma.

### 4. According to Acharya Dalhana

*Acharya Dalhana* has defined the *Marma*, as the points on our body surface, where any form of trauma or injury, results in sudden death.

### 5. According to Acharya Arunadatta

*Arunadatta* says that these are the vital points on which injury lead to *Marana* or *Maranasadrishya Dukha*. *Marma* is the seat of *Prana* which is constituted by confluence of *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Asthi* and *Sandhi*.

### 6. According to Acharya Narahari

*Narahari* the author of *Raja Nighantu* explains the *Marma* as the seat of life - *Jeevasthanam*, which also indicates its association with *Chaithanya*.

### 7. According to Acharya Bhavprakasha

*Bhavprakasha* also says that *Marma* is the meeting point of *Mamsa*, *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi* and *Asthi*, where *Prana* resides.

8. *Schrott et al. (2016)*<sup>[24]</sup> state that besides the physical structure, *Marma* points also represent the junction of mind, body and consciousness; thus, the *Marma* points may hold vital information with regards to thoughts, emotions and feelings, and their link with the overall health. *Schrott et al. (2016)*<sup>[24]</sup> state that stimulation of *Marma* points can affect the functioning of the internal organs

and mind-body coordination, cause healing with regards to improvement in eye-sight, digestive system, headaches, stress, etc.

### Classification of Marma

#### According to Acharya Charaka

*Marmas* are 3 in number they are -

1. *Shira* or *Murdha* (head, brain)
2. *Hridaya* (heart) and
3. *Basti* (urinary bladder)

*Charaka* has said that among all the *Marmas*, these 3 *Marmas* are important ones. Thus, he too has accepted that there are more than 3 *Marmas* (107) but has named 3 of them as the most important ones *Sushruta* too has included these 3 *Marmas* in his 107 *Marmas*.

#### According to Acharya Sushruta<sup>[25]</sup>

*Acharya Sushruta* has explained total 107 *Marma* points. These *Marma* points were classified as below according to - *Rachana* (Anatomy), *Shadanga* (Region), *Sadya-asadhyata* (prognosis) and *Pramana* (Metrical Classification).

#### A. According to the Rachana (anatomy)

SN	Marma points	Number of Marmas (As stated by Sushruta)	Number of Marmas (As stated by Ashtanga Hridaya)
1.	<i>Maans Marma</i> (predominantly in muscle tissues)	11 (eleven)	10 (ten)
2.	<i>Shira Marma</i> (predominantly in blood vessels)	41 (Forty-one)	37 (thirty-seven)
3.	<i>Snayu Marma</i> (predominantly in connective tissues like ligaments, tendons)	27 (twenty-seven)	23 (twenty-three)
4.	<i>Asthi Marma</i> (predominantly in bone tissues)	8 (eight)	8 (eight)

5.	Sandhi Marma (most common in articulating joints)	20 (twenty)	20 (twenty)
6.	Dhamani Marma	-	9 (nine)
	<b>Total</b>	107 (one hundred and seven)	107 (one hundred and seven)

### B. According to the Shadanga (regional classification)

Marma points	Number of Marma (According to Sushruta)
Bahu Marmas (upper and lower extremities)	11 x 4 = 44
Greeva & Urdva Marmas (head and neck)	37
Udara & Uras Marma (abdomen and thorax)	12
Prushtha Marma (back)	14
<b>Total</b>	107

### C. According to the Sadhya-asadhyata (Prognosis)

Marma points	Number of Marma (According to Sushruta)	Dosha predominant
Sadhyopranahara	19	Agneya
Kaalantarapranahara	33	Somya and Agneya
Vishalyaghna	3	Vayavay
Vaikalyakara	44	Somya
Rujaakara	8	Somya, Agneya and Vayavay
<b>Total</b>	107	

### D. According to the Pramana (Metrical Classification)

Marma points	Number of Marma (According to Acharya Sushruta)
Ek Angula	6
Dwi Angula	2
Tri Angula	2

Swapaanitala	9
Ardhangula	88
<b>Total</b>	107

### E. Classification of Marmas according to their therapeutic use

Several scholars have given therapeutic classification of Marmas, which is as follows.<sup>[26]</sup>

- I. Sthula (physical) and Sookshma (subtle)
- II. Vulnerable (lethal) and Less vulnerable (therapeutic)
- III. External and Internal

### Methods of Marma Stimulation (techniques of Marma Chikitsa)

Different methods of stimulating and affecting the Marma points, to gain therapeutic benefits, are available in the literature.

Frawley et al. (2015)<sup>[27]</sup> have described several methods of Marma Therapy, which may be classified into three main groups, i.e.,

- a) Massage and energy methods, which include techniques like Abhyanga (massage), applying aromatic oils, applying pressure, etc.
- b) Herbal methods, which include application of herbal paste, taking medicinal herbs, etc.,
- c) Using instruments, which include Acupuncture, heat application, etc.

Lad and Durve (2015)<sup>[28]</sup> have described 10 methods of stimulating the Marmas, which include oleation, sudation, dry massage, deep pressure, application of paste and heat, puncturing with a needle, etc.

Schrott et al. (2016) explain 20 methods to treat the Marmas, which include techniques like massage, pouring oil, application of herbal paste or heat or light, taking herbal medicines, using aromatic oils, Yagya, Yogasanas, Pranayama, meditation, etc.

Joshi (2010) has been working on Marma stimulation with a very simple method of giving pressure on these points; the rate of applying pressure is in accordance with the heart beat and respiratory rate.

This technique depends upon three basic things -

1. Identification of *Marma* point
2. Giving proper pressure on *Marma* point with the help of thumb and fingers
3. Relaxation of *Marma* point

Thus, it may be understood that different methods can be adopted to stimulate and affect the *Marma* points.

#### Mode of action of Marma Chikitsa

*Marmas* are centres for the vital-force or *Prana*, the master power behind both physical and psychological processes.

- *Marma* points may be regarded as special *Pranic* switches in the body, which when properly stimulated, can lead to the proper flow of *Prana* in different body parts, resulting in the desired therapeutic benefits
- *Prana* can be guided to clear obstructions, enhance energy flow, access latent energy stores, and establish links with the higher forces of nature and life by manipulating *Marmas*.<sup>[29]</sup>
- *Mamsa, Sira, Snayu, Asthi* and *Sandhi Dhamani, Sira, Asthi, Mamsa, Kandra. Sandhi* and *Snayu* are the *Sthan* used for *Marma Chikitsa* performed.
- *Marma* points also help to balance *Tridoshas* and *Trigunas* since it involves various *Pranas* like *Vayu, Sattva, Agni, Rajas* and *Atma*.
- *Marma* is related to the *Prana* which associated with *Vata Dosha* therefore *Marma* mainly deal with *Vata Dosha*. Different *Marma* points are considered for *Vata Vyadhi* Depending upon involvement of *Vata* such as *Prana Vata, Udana Vata, Vyana Vata, Samana Vata* and *Apana*.<sup>[30]</sup>
- *Marma* therapy not only helps in *Vata Vyadhi* but also helps to clear the channels and improve circulation of body.
- It develops physical and mental flexibility, removes *ama* and clinically applied for many disease specially heart problem.
- *Marma* therapy provide stimulation of vital point and thus removes blockages from the *Shrotas* and offer physical and psychological repose.

- Through using *Marmas* we can restore the proper connection between the subtle body (our internal energy, moods and emotions) and the physical body (our material condition), resulting in increased health and vitality on both levels.<sup>[31]</sup>
- Stimulation of *Marma* points optimizes *Prana Vayu* and maintains equilibrium of *Doshas*.
- Instant pain relief is the motive of *Marma Chikitsa*. Stimulation of *Marma* can produce analgesia by secreting a number of prostaglandin inhibitors, endorphins, enterferon and other opoid like substances which are hundreds of times more potent than opium.<sup>[32]</sup>

#### Benefits of Marma Chikitsa

It is an ancient Indian practice whose focus is the manipulation of subtle energy (*Prana*) in the body for the in order to aid in the healing process. The core concept of *Marma* therapy is the application of 107 bodily sites that are said to represent portals to the body, mind, and awareness.

1. *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* are closely related sciences, and *Marmas* play a significant role in both. *Yoga* acknowledges the power of *Prana*, or the life energy, which is expressed through the use of *Marma* points on the body, in addition to having an intricate system of physical postures. Any degree or kind of *Yoga* practice can benefit from a deeper understanding of *Marmas*.<sup>[33]</sup>
2. It creates equilibrium between all vital energies, removes emotional and physical toughness, removes toxins from the body and improves digestion, balances body temperature, provides positive energy, and provides relief from stress, depression, anger, and other mental problems.<sup>[34]</sup>
3. It can be used anywhere, at any time, and without the need for medication.<sup>[35]</sup> It produces exceptionally fast results.
4. *Marma Chikitsa* provides physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits.<sup>[36]</sup>
5. *Marma* therapy is implemented in the *Asthi, Snayu, Sira,* and *Sandhi* areas, among other places,

as it primarily treats conditions pertaining to the neuromuscular, neurological, locomotor, and cardiovascular systems.

6. *Marma Chikitsa* help to flow positive *Prana* through the various channels using pressure on *Marma* points and this *Prana* manage to treat diseases.

## CONCLUSION

*Marmas* are vital points, centres for the *Prana*. *Marma Chikitsa* is a natural, non-invasive, instant and permanent method of healing. The purpose of a *Marma Chikitsa* is to stimulate the various bodily organs and systems It can be used anywhere, at any time, and without the need for medication. *Marma* knowledge is extensively well known since *Vedic* period. Later, its progression can be seen in *Samhitha Kala* through the texts emerged during that period like *Susrutha Samhitha*. They can be used specifically for the diagnosis and treatment of disease or generally for promoting health and longevity. *Marmas* are integral to all *Ayurvedic* therapies from simple self-treatments to complex clinical procedures. This paper tried to obtain all the information's related to *Marma* from classics and highlight its benefits from *Ayurvedic* point of view.

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