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# Understanding the concept of *Marma* and their clinical applicaion in *Shalya Tantra* w.s.r. to Vital points

Dr. Mamatha TS,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Shankar S. Swamy,<sup>2</sup> Dr. S. V. Shailaja<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post Graduate Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, <sup>3</sup>Professor & HOD, Department of Shalya Tantra, Sri Kalabyraveshwara Swamy Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Bangalore, Karnataka, INDIA.

## ABSTRACT

*Marma* therapy is the original point system of healing in the body. "*Marma*" come from the sanskrit "*Mru*" and which means "To kill" the 107 *Marma* points are categorised in terms of their effect on the vitality of the body. *Marma* is one of the unique and important topics discussed in Ayurveda. It plays an important role in surgery. Hence it is rightly called as *Shalya Vishayardha*. *Marma* plays a significant clinical role and may be correlated to the Acupressure/Acupuncture. *Marma* are the critical points of body associated with different organs and nerves. Ayurveda describe use of *Marma* therapy for various diseases and identification of *Marma* points which is to be cured, since injury to these *Marma* points may causes serious harmful effect. Different types of muscles, veins, bones, ligaments and joints meets with each other at the *Marma* point thus these points acts as a physiological junction. Discussion of *Marma* points is found in most of the great texts of Ayurveda but the most famous text to explore the subject is the *Sushruta Samhita*. *Vaidya Sushruta* described 'the locations of the *Marma* points, as well as how they influence *Prana*. He stated that it is important for the surgeon to have knowledge of these points for the purpose of avoiding them, so as to cut into them could result in a catastrophic outcome. This article summarizes various perspectives of *Marma* and their clinical importance as per Ayurveda.

**Key words:** *Marma, Shalya Tantra, Marma therapy, Acupressure, Acupuncture, Vital points.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Marma* is one of the unique and important topics discussed in Ayurveda. It plays an important role in surgery. Hence it is rightly called as *Shalya Vishayardha*.

We get many references of major surgeries being

### Address for correspondence:

**Dr. Mamatha TS**

Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Shalya Tantra,  
Sri Kalabyraveshwara Swamy Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital  
& Research Centre, Bangalore, Karnataka, INDIA.

E-mail: mamathamamjunath555@gmail.com

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carried out by *Sushruta* in our classics by administering *Sura* or *Madira*. But it seems that there was some kind of *Bandha* or Pressure being applied over *Marma Sthana* which is a seat of *Prana* to create anaesthetic or analgesic effect for performing surgeries. In present days we see same kind of analgesic or anaesthetic effect being done by acupuncturists for performing some minor surgeries and to treat many of chronic ailments.

*Marma* point (Vital point) is defined as the site where there is confluence of structures like *Mamsa* (Muscular component), *Sira* (Vascular component), *Snayu* (Neuroconnective tissue component), *Asthi* (Sclerous component) and *Sandhi* (Articular component) and *Prana* (Life force) resides making it as its specific place.

Knowledge of the *Marma* is described as half the knowledge of *Shalya Tantra* (Science of surgery), as

persons injured in the vital spot die immediately or suffer from unforeseen ailment which is life threatening; if anyone survives by the efficiency of the physician, is sure to suffer from deformities.<sup>[1]</sup> Injury to the *Marma*, though slight, will produce severe pain; similarly, the disorders localized in the *Marma Sthana*. Hence they should be treated with great care and effort.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Types of Marma and their importance in Ayurveda

*Marma* has been described by several ancient Ayurvedic masters including *Charaka* and *Vagbhata*, among others. The best description however is given by *Sushruta*, the 'father of surgery' in the *Sushruta Samhita*. He covered many aspects of anatomy and surgery in this text, written centuries ago. According to *Sushruta*, Marma points are the seats of life.

Marma are the places where the three *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*) are present, along with their subtle forms (*Prana* or vital force, *Tejas* or inner radiance and *Ojas* or essence of life). The three *Gunas* of *Satva* (beingness), *Rajas* (activity) and *Tamas* (darkness) are also present.

*Acharya Sushruta* described 107 Marma points in the body and **most** of the ancient texts of Ayurveda have given importance to Marma and explained 107 Marma in a separate chapter.<sup>[3]</sup>

*Aacharya Sushruta* defined *Marma* as the vital points of the body which shows various fatal signs and symptoms on traumatic injury.<sup>[4]</sup> Where *Prana* (vital energy) resides or flows through.<sup>[5]</sup> In spite of great importance, there is no direct mention of therapeutic use in Ayurvedic literature.

Depending upon traumatic effects and prognosis, various types of marmas mentioned in Ayurveda as follows.<sup>[6]</sup>

1. *Sadhyapranahara* (Sudden death)
2. *Kalantarpranahara* (Death within short period)
3. *Vaikalyakara* (Deformity due to trauma)
4. *Vishalyaghna* (Person lives until removal of foreign body)

5. *Rujakara* (continuous pain due to trauma)

These are superficial and deeply seated points in the body which involves

1. *Mamsa* (Muscle) (10 numbers)
2. *Sira* (Vein) (41 numbers)
3. *Snayu* (Ligament) (27 numbers)
4. *Asthi* (Bone) (8 nubmers)
5. *Sandhi* (Joints) (20 numbers)

### The Marma points by Dosha

Here's a breakdown of the 107 *Marma* points according to one's constitution or, the predominant tissue or predominance of physical matrix present.<sup>[7]</sup>

- There are 11 *Marma* points present in the muscle tissue. These are called *Mamsa Marma*.
- There are 41 *Marma* points predominant in the blood vessels. These are known as *Sira Marma*.
- There are 27 *Marma* points predominant in the ligaments and tendons. These are called *Snayu Marma*.
- There are 8 *Marma* points predominant in the bones. These are referred to as *Asthi Marma*.
- There are 20 *Sandhi Marmas*, or *Marma* points predominant in the joints.

### The Marma points by location<sup>[8]</sup>

- There are 22 *Marma* points in both upper limbs (11 *Marma* in each upper limb).
- There are 22 *Marma* points in both lower limbs (11 *Marma* in each lower limb).
- There are 26 *Marma* points in the thorax and abdomen.
- There are 37 *Marma* points located in the head and neck.

### The Marma points by effect of injury to the Marma<sup>[9]</sup>

This classification was more suitable to ancient times when there were wars and fighting and people lived in forests and tribes.

In modern times, it is not really applicable as medical management of wounds and injuries has changed substantially with the advent of modern surgery, trauma management, life saving equipment, medicines and techniques.

However these *Marma* can be understood as ones which need to be protected from accidental injuries. If injured, these *Marma* warrant immediate medical attention and management to save mortality and morbidity.

#### Marma points are affected by injury

- *Sadhya Pranahara Marma* - *Marmas* with which, on getting inflicted with injury, cause instant death.
- *Kaalantar Pranhar Marma* - If these *Marma* are injured then gradual and slow death occurs.
- *Vishalyaghana Marma* - If these *Marma* are injured then death can occur.
- *Vaikalyakar Marma*, If these 44 *Marma* are injured, deformity and pain can result.
- *Rujakara Marma*, If these 8 *Marma* are injured, pain occurs.

#### Trimarmam<sup>[10]</sup>

Among 107 *Marmas* mentioned earlier in *Sutrasthana*, *Basthi*, *Hrudaya* and *Siras* (*Trimarma*) are given prime importance by eminent scholars. The reason behind is this three *Marmas* are *Sthana* for *Prana*, and any kind of *Pida* (injury - physical or mentally) may cause death of the patient.

- **Hrudaya:** As the spoke of wheel are attached to the centre, similarly the ten vessels, *Prana Vayu*, *Apana Vayu*, *Manas*, *Bhudhi*, consciousness, and *Mahabhutas* are attached to the heart.
- **Siras:** Head is the abode of senses, sensory channels and channels carrying elen vitae as the sun is the abode of its rays.
- **Basthi:** The urinary bladder, located in the midst of *Sthula Guda* (rectum), *Muska* (testicles), *Sevani* and seminal as well as urinary channels, is the receptacle of urine into which all the channels of

the body carrying liquid elements converge as all the rivers on the earth flow into the ocean.

#### Samanya Lakshanas of Trimarma injury

Serious injury to *Trimarma* causes destruction of the body, since the destruction of the *Asrayas* leads to destruction of supra structures. Partial injury to these leads to affliction by serious diseases, therefore these vital organs should be specially protected from external injury and application by *Vayu* etc.

#### Samanya Chikitsa<sup>[11]</sup>

The *Marmas* are to be protected from aggravated *Vayu*, because the aggravated *Vayu* is responsible for aggravation of *Pitta*, *Kapha* and *Vayu*. The *Vayu* is best treated with *Basti* so, there is none other than *Basti* therapy which can safeguard the vital organs.

#### Discussion

The science of *Marma* is one of the exclusive concepts of Ayurveda which has been well developed by keen observations, especially at the time of surgical procedures. These are very special and vital superficial points spread on the whole body surface. They are special because these points are the sites of '*Prana*' (Life processes). Moreover, *Vishama Spandana* is also very phenomenal characteristics of these *Marma* points.

*Acharya Sushruta* in his *Marma Adhyaya*, *Acharya Charaka* in his *Trimarmiya Siddhi Adhyaya*, and *Chikitsa Adhyaya*, *Ashtanga Hridayam* in his *Marma Vibhaga* have made classical description throwing light on every aspect of *Marma*. The *Marmas* are very important from traumatological point of view. It has been observed that any *Trauma* at this very point is more threatening or found to be delayed in recovery from injuries. *Acharya Sushruta* has mentioned the same in *Marmabhigta Lakshanas*. The *Lakshanas* of *Marma* after trauma or injury is also depending upon its structural type.

#### CONCLUSION

*Marmas* are vital points, centers for the *Prana*. They can be used specifically for the diagnosis and treatment of disease or generally for promoting

health and longevity. Human body when exposed to trauma shows various sign and symptoms depending on severity and types of trauma. *Acharya Sushruta* mention 107 deep or superficial points on body surface when get traumatized produce various signs and symptoms not only on the basis of type of injury but on the basis of its constituents. Our physic comprises vessels, muscles, bones, joints, nerves, ligaments etc. every where in more or less proportion. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the point where all the above structures meet and is the site of *Prana* (vitality) is nothing but *Marma*. “*Agni Soma Vayu*” are basic components of *Marma*. Ayurveda emphasized on anatomical knowledge as part of diagnosis and treatment. The surgical interventions needed great consideration of anatomical perspective, any misconception regarding anatomical framework may leads failure of medical procedure. *Marmas* are integral to all Ayurvedic therapies from simple self treatments to complex clinical procedures. They form one of the main pillars of Ayurvedic thought and practice. This article described *Marma* points which need to be covered while *Marmaghatha* to prevent fatal conditions.

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