

**MARMA - THE MULTI DIMENSIONAL HEALING POINTS OF AYURVEDA**Mishra D. P.<sup>1</sup>      Srivastava Mayank<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Dept. of Shalya Tantra, <sup>2</sup>Dept. of Kaumarbhritya,

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**ABSTRACT**

Traditionally, the knowledge of *Marma* has been used for long in surgeries and martial arts. But there is no direct mention of therapeutic use of *marma* in *Ayurvedic* literatures. It is now recognized both in India and abroad, as an effective, non invasive and handy method of wholesome healing. The concept of *marma* in *Ayurveda*, *chakras* in *Yoga* and meridian system in Acupressure/Acupuncture resemble each other closely. *Marma* can be viewed as the meridian point system of *Ayurveda*, corresponding to organs, nerves, and bodily systems. Through stimulation of *marma* by means of *Abhyanga* (massage), *Mardana* (Acupressure), Aroma therapy, *Pranic* healing, Herbs (*lepa*), *Raktamokshan* (blood letting) and *Agni karma*, the *Prana* (life energy) can be directed to remove blockages and stimulate energy flow, thus resulting in a healthy state of body, mind and spirit. It may be used independently or as a hands-on adjunct to the standard therapies recommended for a particular health issue. This study serves to present a condensed view on the various aspects of this versatile method of treatment.

**Keywords:** *Ayurveda*, *Marma*, Massage, Meridian, *Prana*

**INTRODUCTION**

*Ayurveda*, the world's ancient most system of healing possesses innumerable number of topics and concepts for addressing all sorts of health issues. But as these solutions are mostly written encrypted in the form of *sutra*, they need to be deciphered and critically analyzed for enabling their proper use. *Marma* science is one such section whose healing potential has still not been harnessed to its complete potential because of lack of proper study & practice on it. Very few therapies exist which are effective and non invasive too, *marma* therapy ranks high amongst them.

The concept of *marma* in *Ayurveda*, *chakra* in *Yoga* and meridian system in Acupressure/Acupuncture resemble each other

closely. *Ayurveda*, literally meaning the 'science of life', believes in treating mind-body-spirit in toto for ensuring a complete state of health and this ancient wisdom is well reflected in the unique concept and composition of *marmas* also. Another simultaneously developing system of healing, *Yoga*, is based on the assumption of a hierarchy of seven major energy centers in the body- the '*Chakras*', which communicate with internal organs through a network of thousands of channels (or meridians) - the '*Nadis*'<sup>1</sup> Whereas the Chinese system of medicine, Acupuncture, is based upon a similar concept of bio-energetic channels in the form of 'meridians'.

### The composition of *marma*

Apart from the gross anatomical description, *Ayurvedic* literatures specifically observe 107 superficially and deeply situated sites on human body where *Dhamani*, *Sira*, *Asthi*, *Kandara*, *Mamsa*, *Snayu*, or *Sandhi* cross or connect, and where 12 *Pra-nas* (the components of life or vital energy) resides or flows through.<sup>2</sup> Such a composition & amenable location of these vital points makes them highly vulnerable areas and hence have been rightly termed as *marma* (*marma* points) or *jeevasthanas* or *pranayatana*.

### Historical use of the *marma* points

*Siravedhan* and paying heed to *marma* points during surgical or parasurgical procedures (as *karmavedhana*) were popular during the almost 5000 year old *Vedic* and the following *samhita* period. Lord *Dhanvantari* had elaborated these methods in a very simple and practical form, as described in *Sushruta Samhita*. During that period, treatment through *Dhamani*, *Sira* and *Marma* was in its supreme and highly developed state. But no further progress in *marma* therapy was observed thereafter and its use instead gradually went on declining in India because of frequent foreign invasions and colonial rule.<sup>3</sup>

In view of the need for prompt management of emergencies in the battlefield, in ancient India even the soldiers were taught about different *marma*. Later on, on the basis of this knowledge of *marma*, an Indian martial art *Kalari payatu* was developed. The knowledge of *marma* was disseminated by the Buddhist monks to other Asian countries, especially China, Japan and Korea. China further developed the therapeutic figure of this art in the form of Acupuncture and Acupressure.<sup>4</sup> Thus the historical use of

various *marma* was in surgeries (as precautions) and the martial arts, but there is no direct mention of *marma chikitsa* in ancient texts.

### Therapeutic potential of *marma* points and the aim of this study

Through their inherent *pranic* channels (as stated above), the *marma* points make relation with various internal organs, *doshas* and *srotas*. Hence, these points may be used to influence the functioning (stimulate/inhibit) of internal organs. Thus, on one hand, any injury on these locations can cause severe pain/disability/loss of function/loss or sensation/death (i.e., disease on these locations carry bad prognosis); on other hand, judicious use of a proper therapeutic procedure over the specific *marma* may be used to treat various disease conditions and promote health. But despite all the aforesaid benefits, till date from therapeutic point of view, *marmas* have remained an almost unfolded concept of *Ayurveda*. The aim of this study is to create a sense of oneness in the three conceptually similar therapies of *marmas*, *Yogic chakras* and the Chinese meridian system and thus aid an in depth understanding of the concept of *marmas*, in turn promoting an effective therapeutic usage of the *marma* points, for the benefit of mankind.

### DISCUSSION

#### Bridging the *marmas*, *Yogic chakras* and the Chinese meridian system - the parts of the same story:

***Marma and Yogic chakras:*** When we compare the two powerful wholesome systems of healing, *Ayurveda* and *Yoga*, we find cross links in between, as all the major *chakras* can be seen to be located over the major *marma* sites explained in *Ayurveda*. So, as there are *nadis* (channels) to connect

different *chakras*, in the similar way *marma*s may also be visualized as secondary *chakra* systems which have connection on one side with the main *chakras* and on other side with organ systems.

**Marma therapy and the Chinese Meridian system:** The Chinese acupressure/acupuncture is based upon the thought of presence of an orderly sequence (in a line array) of bioenergetic points in the whole body- ‘the meridian system’, which are in communication with organs, nerves, and bodily systems. Although, there is no direct description of meridian system in *Sushruta Samhita* (and *Ayurveda*), but as our ancestors used to mention the facts briefly in the form of *sutra*, we can find a glimpse of it in the form of *marmas*. The severity based classification of *marmas* clearly shows that these *Ayurvedic* equivalents of meridians are not assembled in line as the various points in Chinese acupuncture system; nevertheless *marma* points may also be used in a similar way to treat various diseases.

Thus the ancient *marma* and the *yogic* science can be considered to be the seed of the Chinese meridian system (acupuncture, acupressure), yet again proving that *Vedas* and *Ayurveda* are the primary source of wisdom for all sciences. Therapeutically, the *marmas* may be used in an effective, easy and comprehensive way by observing them as the ‘*Ayurvedic* equivalent of the meridian system’ and studying them in ways as:

1. On the basis of symptoms<sup>5</sup>
2. On the basis of their structure
3. On the basis of regional anatomy
4. On the basis of *Srotas* ( channels)
5. On the basis of 14 *yogic nadis* (*yogic* system)

Out of all the above ones, the classification based on symptoms is most important, as it gives us a direct clue about different diseases according to the classical *Tridosha* theory of *Ayurveda*. We can summarize them as in table 1:

Table 1: Types of *marma*

<i>Marma</i> type	Nature	<i>Dosha</i> Predominance
<i>Sadhyopranhar</i>	<i>Agneya</i>	<i>Pitta</i>
<i>Kalantarpranhar</i>	<i>Saumya-Agneya</i>	<i>Kapha , Pitta</i>
<i>Vaikalyakar</i>	<i>Saumya</i>	<i>Kapha</i>
<i>Vishalyaghna</i>	<i>Vayavya</i>	<i>Pitta, Vata</i>
<i>Rujakar</i>	<i>Agneya-Vayavya</i>	<i>Vata</i>

In the absence of any direct reference for use of *marma* points for treatment purposes, it can be made out from the above mentioned chart that *Sadhyopranhar marma* may be used to treat disorders related with *Pitta Dosha* imbalance, *Vaikalyakar marma* for *Kapha* imbalance and *Vishalyaghna* and *Rujakar marma* for *Vata* imbalances.

**Therapeutic spectrum of the *Marma***

Many scientific researchers have demonstrated that during different *yogic*

postures and breathing techniques, many hormones are secreted in the body, which are helpful in curing many disorders. *Marma* points are an equally useful bio-energetic points situated over the surface of body, which once pressed/ punctured (influenced), can stimulate a therapeutically useful chain of sequence by influencing the supreme *Chakra* system via the *dhamani, sira* and *srotas* system of *Ayurveda*. *Marma chikitsa* can thus improve the functioning of body

organs by achieving homeostasis, making it the most versatile and handy *Ayurvedic* and *Yogic* tool for managing of all sorts of health issues. In fact, the *marma* therapy, *yogic chakras* and the Chinese meridian system may all be used in a mutually complementary way.

Many modes of treatment are available, which directly or indirectly work by influencing *marmas*, but all of them basically require application of some kind of pressure or / and appropriate medications over the different *marma* points. Influencing these *marmas* by methods as *Abhyanga* (massage), *Mardana* (acupressure), Aromatherapy, *Pranic* healing, Herbs (*lepa*), *Raktamokshan* (blood letting), *Marma* puncture, *Kshara karma* and *Agni karma*, the *Prana* (vital energy) existing in *marmas* may be directed to remove blockages (even in remotely connected areas) and stimulate energy flow, thus resulting in a state of healthy body, mind and spirit.<sup>6</sup> In general, a judicious application of pressure on appropriate *marma* can restore the normal functioning of *prana* (in diseased body parts). Thus, it has extensive indications as, for balancing the *tridoshas*, for increasing the *agnis* (digestive &/or metabolic fire), for promoting healing, for removing the *ama* (detoxification), as well as for promoting health and vitality (*rasayana* and *vajikarana* effects). With proper use, it can cause an almost instant reduction in pain; whereas their improper manipulation may cause severe pain/disability/death-as is knowingly done in martial arts! So, it should always be remembered that these therapies should not be applied indiscriminately on all the *marma* points (especially the *sadyahapranahara* and the *trimarmas*). Thus on the basis of their primary use, they may also be classified

into two types – ‘Therapeutic *marmas*’ and the ‘Lethal *marmas*.’ *Marma* points are thus a double edged sword, whose results primarily depend upon the nature and extent of their stimulation.

Presently many therapists are using *marma* points during *Abhyanga*, along with the application of different kinds of *Ayurvedic* and aromatic oils, as per the symptoms of patients.<sup>7</sup> *Marma* practitioners as Dr. Sunil Joshi have noticed that stimulation of specific *marmas* is useful for a specific group of conditions:<sup>8</sup>

- *Kshipra, Talhridaya, Kurcha, Kurcha-shira, Gulpha, Indrabasti, Janu, Urvi* and *Ani marma* are useful in the treatment of vertebral column injuries and spinal cord lesions.
- *Dhamani, Sira, Matrika, Krikatika, Vidhura, Apanga, Avarta, Utkshepa, Sankha, Sthapani, Simantas* and *Adhipati marma* are useful in the treatment of facial paralysis.
- *Kshipra, Talhridaya, Kurcha, Kurcha-shora, Manibandha, Indrabasti, Kurpara, Bahi, Ani, Dhamani, Matrika, Krikatika, Amsa* and *Amsaphalaka marmas* are useful in the treatment of torticollis and cervical spondylosis.
- *Marma* of upper and lower extremities, back and head are useful in treating cerebral palsy.

In our opinion (primarily based upon the knowledge of *Sushrut Samhita*), *marma* points can be used to balance the *Tridoshas* at physical level and *Trigunas* at the mental level, as 12 *Pranas* [namely *soma, vayu, agni, sattva, rajas, tamas*; five sense organs or their elements (*panchamahabhutas*); and specially *atma* (soul)] reside in *marmas*. It in turn also means that physical and non physical symptoms may be felt over different

*marma* points, as all the internal organs are related to one or more *marma* points. So *marma* can be used for healing as well as for diagnostic purpose. *Trigunas* are psychological manifestation of *Tridosha* aspect of human being, therefore *marma* can be used to treat physical as well as psycho-logical illnesses. As *Ayurveda* also affirms the spiritual aspect of *marma* by considering *triguna* and *atma* residing over these points, its highly probable that *marmas* may also have connections with those subtle *nadis*, which thus connects them to *Chakra* system, the higher energy source (as per *yogic* sciences). *Marmas* are thus directly or indirectly related to *doshas*, *sapta chakras* and *nadis*, and hence they may be assumed to be those important seats of psycho-neuro-endocrino-immunological pathways which may be influenced in order to regulate the physical, mental and spiritual functions, thus enabling establishment/ return of a complete state of health and vitality. *Marma* therapy may thus help in increasing or recharging physical, mental and spiritual energies.

It is important here to stress on the need of having a precise theoretical as well as practical knowledge of the aforesaid aspects, without which the results are impossible and even complications may occur. Their use can be of greater importance at extremes of age (children & geriatric) and in diseases where internal administration of drugs is associated with higher risks (viz. renal failure). Thus, *marmas* are available as an almost instrumentless, yet effective method for treating all sorts of disorders, whether acute or chronic. They can at least be used as an emergency treatment or as a supplementary therapy for enhancing the results of any standard therapy recommended for a particular disease.

## CONCLUSION

*Marmas* can be considered as the meridian point system of *Ayurveda*, which correspond to various organs, nerves, and bodily systems (internal organs). The *Marma* points are usually located close to the skin surface and *Prana*, the vital energy flows through them. They were originally mentioned to make the surgeons cautious while approaching these areas & hence this knowledge was later on utilized in the martial arts. Now it is increasingly being realized, both in India and abroad, that a judicious application of pressure and/or appropriate medications on the *marma* points can restore the normal functioning of *prana* (in the corresponding diseased body parts) and may even cause an almost instant reduction in pain and sufferings.

The use of *marma* for therapeutic purposes needs more attention on scientific lines in order to promote its widespread acceptance and a revival in true sense. A harmonious use of the know-how of the other two analogous methods of healing- the *yogic chakras* and the Chinese meridian system (acupressure) may also serve to increase the efficacy of *marma* treatment.

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