# A Historical Review on Literature of *Marma* Science – An Ancient Healing Technique

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#### **A**BSTRACT

Marma science is one of the hidden sciences of Ayurveda which was practiced in Vedic era. Marma science is an ancient art of healing based on re-energizing vital points in the body for revamping the Prana which is hidden status as Gupta Vidya (occult science). After stimulating the Marma points, many transformations in the body's biochemistry might occur, resulting in a revolutionary chemical change in one's make-up. Stimulation of these inner pharmacy pathways causes the body to produce therapeutic neurochemicals which allow the body and mind to heal. There are only a few scattered references in Vedic literature which indicate that this science has flourished since the beginning of humanity. In this review article, a modest attempt is made to gather historical details of Marma science, which might be used to re-explore Ayurveda's new realms.

**Keywords:** Acupressure, Acupuncture, Ayurveda, *Marma*, *Marma* therapy, *Varma*, *Prana Asian Pac. J. Health Sci.*, (2022); DOI: 10.21276/apjhs.2022.9.4.67

#### INTRODUCTION

Marma science is one of the hidden sciences of Ayurveda which was practiced in Vedic era. As per principles of Ayurveda, an anatomical place, where muscles, veins, ligaments, bones, and joints connect, is known as a Marma point.[1] These are vitally significant locations known as the "seats of life" (Prana – the vital life force).[2] Marma science is an ancient art of healing based on re-energizing vital points in the body for revamping the Prana which is hidden status as Gupta Vidya. After stimulating the Marma points, many transformations in the body's biochemistry might occur, resulting in a revolutionary chemical change in one's make-up. Stimulation of these inner pharmacy pathways causes the body to produce therapeutic neurochemicals which allow the body and mind to heal. There are only a few scattered references in Vedic literature which indicate that this science has flourished since the beginning of humanity. The Vedic literature suggests that the configuration of Prana or vital energy in living organisms follows the blueprint of nature's approach.

Acupuncture therapy is a part of Chinese medicine, wherein various disease conditions are treated by the insertion of dry needles at specific locations in the body. Acupressure is similar in principle to acupuncture, wherein instead of puncturing a pressure of varying degree is applied on various body parts to treat the disease. The goal of acupuncture is to correct imbalances of flow and restore health through stimulation, generally by inserting needles through the skin at points along the meridians of the body. The current acupuncture information lists up to 400 different acupuncture points for various health problems. [3]

Some medical studies have suggested that acupressure may be effective at helping manage nausea and vomiting, for helping lower back pain, tension headaches, and stomach ache, among other things, although such studies have been found to have a high likelihood of bias.<sup>[4]</sup>

The principle behind acupuncture or acupressure therapy does not match with the classical description of *Marma*. There is again the difference between the number and site of acupressure and *Marma* points. It cannot be concluded that these *Marma* points correspond to the acupressure points used for various pain

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relieving therapies. Hence, the reliability of *Marma* therapy is still uncertain.

# MARMA IN VEDAS

Marma science is a very ancient hidden medical science. Marma has been known from the period of the Vedas, which goes back to 4000 BC.

# Rigveda

The usage of *Varma* or protective covering is mentioned in the *Rigveda* for providing protection to the *Marmas*. It also adds that prayer or *Mantra* is the best method of protection (*Varma*) for the *Marmas*, emphasizing the spiritual aspects of this ancient discipline. [5]

मर्माणि ते वर्मणा छादयामि सोमस्त्वा राजामृतेनानु वस्ताम् । उरोवँरीयो वरुणस्ते कृणोतु जयन्तं त्वानु देवा मदन्तु ॥ (Rigveda 6/75/18).[6]

Meaning – O rider of the chariot! A protective shield or body armor protects your *Marma* points.

अस्मा इदु त्वष्टा तक्षद्वज्रं स्वपस्तमं स्वर्यं रणाय । वृत्रस्य चिद्वदिधेन मर्म तुजन्नशानस्तुजता किर्यधाः ॥ (Rigveda 1/61/6).<sup>[6]</sup>

Meaning - The destroyer of enemies, the extremely powerful

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deity *Indra*, destroyed the demon *Vritra* by striking his *Marma sthan* (vital point) with the *Vajra* (weapon).

#### Atharvaveda

Marma is a term used in the Atharvaveda to denote to essential organs. Because once damage is done to Marmasthan, it leads to death. During these days, due to numerous warfare, plastic surgery was practiced by Ashwini Kumaras during the Vedic period on a limb that was cut in three places, regaining the local mobility.

मर्माणि ते वर्मणा छादयामि सोमस्त्वा राजामृतेनानु वस्ताम् । उरोवँरीयो वरुणस्ते कृणोतु जयन्तं त्वानु देवा मदन्तु ॥ (Atharvaveda 7/123/1)

The verse 7/123/1 given above talks about protecting the *Marma* points by a protective shield or body armor.

पराध देवा वृजनिं श्रृणन्तु प्रत्यगेनं शपथा यन्तु सृष्टाः ।

वाचास्तेनं शरव ऋच्छन्तु मर्मन् विश्वस्यैतु प्रसिति यातुधानः ॥ (Atharvaveda 8/3/14)

संवत्सरीणं पय उस्त्रियायास्तस्य माशीद् यातुधानो नृचक्शः । पीयुषमग्रे यतमस्तितृप्सात् प्रत्यन्चमर्चिषा विध्य मर्मणि॥

पीयुषमग्रे यतमस्तितृप्सात् प्रत्यन्चमर्चिषा विध्य मर्मणि (Atharvaveda 8/3/17)

मर्मावधिं रोरुवृतं सुपर्णैरदनुतु दुश्चितिं मृदितिं शूयानम् ।

य इमा प्रतीचीमाहुतिममित्रों नो युयुत्सति ॥ (Atharvaveda 11/12/26)

The verses 8/3/14, 8/3/17, and 11/12/26 given above talk about attacking the *Marma* points of the enemies with arrows and shattering them. It is also evident from verses 8/3/14 and 8/3/17 that *Agni* (fire) was used as the ultimate weapon to destroy *Marma*. आथवरणीरांगरिसीदेवीर्मनुष्यजा उत

ओषधयः प्रजायन्ते यदा त्वं प्राण जिन्वसि ॥ (Atharvaveda 11/6/16).<sup>[7]</sup>

Meaning – O Prana! when you satisfy (everyone) by pouring down as rain, then all the medicinal herbs, that have been created by *Maharshi Atharva*, produced by the descendants of *Maharshi Angira* and the deities, and culivated by human beings, are manifested.

*Prana* is the vital life force that governs all the physical and subtle processes of a living being.<sup>[8-11]</sup> *Marmas* are the seats of *Prana* – verse 11/6/16 given above states the importance of *Prana*.

#### Yajurveda

The soldiers and warriors gathered in the combat field wore helmets, arm resistant metallic guards, and other protective gear to protect their vital organs, which were referred to as *Marma*.<sup>[12]</sup>

# MARMA IN UPANISHADAS

Several *Upanishadas* such as *Shandilyopanishada*, *Garbhopanishada*, and *Kshurikopanishada* provides the information about the conceptual and anatomical aspects of *Marma* points.

# Garbhopanishada<sup>[13]</sup>

It states that the human body consists of 107 *Marmas* (weak or sensitive spots).

# Shandilyopanishada<sup>[14]</sup>

अष्टादशसु मर्मस्थानेषु क्रमाद्धारणं प्रत्याहार: (Shandilyopanishada 1/8/1)

Meaning - Doing dharana (establishing deep linkage of the

inner consciousness with the divine currents present at those locations and experience the resulting divine feelings) one by one on the

18 Marma locations is called Pratyahara.

पादांगुष्ठगुल्फजंघाजान्रुपायुमेढनाभिह्रदयकण्ठकूपतालुनासाअ क्शदिभ्रुमध्यललाटमूर्ध्निस्थाननि ।

तेषु क्रमादारोहावरोहक्रमेण प्रत्याहरेत् ॥ (Shandilyopanishada 1/8/2)

Meaning – The names of the eighteen *Marma* locations have been told here as – big toe, *Gulpha*, *Jangha*, *Janu*, *Uru*, *Guda*, *Linga*, *Nabhi*, *Hridaya*, *Kanthakupa*, *Talu*, *Nasika*, *Akshi*, *Bhroomadhya*, *Lalaata*, and *Murdhni* – on all these locations *Pratyahara* should be done in the order of going up and down.

# Kshurikopanishada<sup>[14]</sup>

पादास्योपरि यन्मर्म तद्रूपं नाम चतियेत्।

मनोद्धारेण तीक्शणेन योगमाश्रत्य नत्यशः ॥ (Kshurikopanishada 12)

इन्दरवज्र इति प्रोक्तं मर्मजंघानुकृन्तनम् ।

तद् ध्यानंबलयोगेनं धारणाभरिनकिन्तयेत् ॥ (Kshurikopanishada 13) ऊरवोरमध्ये तु संस्थाप्य मरमप्राणविमोचनम् ।

चतुरभ्यासयोगेन छन्दिदनभशिंकतिः ॥ (Kshurikopanishada 14)

Meaning – Contemplate on the name and form of the *Marma* locations of the legs. By daily taking help of yoga, and with a sharp mind, pierce the area named "Indravajra" which is located next to the thighs. There, in between the *Urus* (thighs), establish the *Prana* (that specifies the location of the *Marmas*) with the combined effort of *dhyan bal* (meditation power) and *dharana*, by yoga become doubtless of the sharp *dharana* of the mind, and pierce the four *Marma* locations (from the root plexus to the heart).

#### MARMA IN PURANAS

#### Kurma Purana<sup>[15]</sup>

परक्शेते गां धयन्तीं न् चाचक्शीत कस्यचित् ।

न् संचवदेत् सूतके च न कज्चिन्मर्मणि स्पृशेत् ॥ (Kuram Purana Uparivibhage 2/16/33)

*Kurma Purana* mentions that the touching of *Marma* points is prohibited.

#### Agni Purana[16,17]

In chapter 370 (Sharira Avayava – parts of the body) of Agni Purana, ten locations have been mentioned, where the Prana resides – Murdha, Hridaya, Nabhi, Kantha, Jihvaa, Shukra, Rakta, Guda, Vasti, and Gulpha – all these are Marma points, as these are the seats of Prana.

# MARMA IN BRAHMANAS

*Brahmana Gratha* like *Shatapatha Brahmana* describes the important *Marma* locations, that is, the Navel, head and heart, as well as various *Pranas*, *Dhatus*, and body organs.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### MARMA IN EPICS

In the great epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, many references of Marma or Varman are found.

# Ramayana<sup>[18]</sup>

ततो मर्मसु मर्मग्नो मज्जय्न्नशितिांशरान् ।

रामलक्शमणयोवीरो ननाद च मुहुर्मुहु: ॥ (Valmiki Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda 45/15)

Meaning – Meghnad, who had knowledge of *Marma* points, hit arrows in all the tender body parts of ShriRamchandra ji and Lakshman ji, and started making deafening noises again and again.

तौ संप्रचलितौ वीरौ मर्मभेदेन कर्शितौ । (Valmiki Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda 45/18)

Meaning – The great archer, Jagatpati (master of the world), Shri Ramchandra ji and Lakshman ji, who were severely perturbed by the piercing of the *Marma* points, fell on the ground.

चिक्शेप परमायत्तस्तं शरे मर्मघातिन् । (Valmiki Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda Pu. 111/16)

Meaning – To kill Ravana, ShriRamchandra ji held up the bow, and with great strength, shot the arrow that would pierce and destroy all the *Marma* points.

#### Mahabharata

The great epic Mahabharata contains many references of marma or varma (Bhishma Parva 114/56, 119/5, 119/47, 119/61, and 119/65),<sup>[19]</sup> (Drona Parva 92/7 and 92/22), (Karna Parva 19/61), (Shalya Parva 32/63 and 36/64), etc.<sup>[20]</sup>

It mentions the use of protective coverings for the *Marmas* of both the soldiers, and the animals used in warfare such as the elephants and horses. Warriors were capable of using their *Prana* and *Mantras* for empowering the fighting instruments (like arrows) with the natural forces like fire. There were several great warriors who could only be defeated if their *Marma* points were destroyed.<sup>[5]</sup>

# MARMA IN SAMHITAS

Almost all of the classical works written during *Samhita kala* provide a description of the number of *Marmas*, their location, and the structures involved, as well as a full explanation of *Marmaghata* or *Viddha lakshanas* and diseases. The total number of *Marmas* is 107, according to all *Acharyas*.

# Charak Samhita<sup>[21]</sup>

*Trimarmas*, that is, *Basti*, *Hridaya*, and *Shirah*, are given significant emphasis by Acharya Charaka, who considers the total number of *Marmas* to be 107 in (Charaka Siddhi Sthana 9/1) and (Charaka Chikitsa Sthana 26/3)

सप्त्तोतरं मर्मशतम् । (Charaka Siddhi Sthana 9/1)

मर्माणि बस्ति हरदयं शरिश्च प्रधानभूतानि वदन्ति तज्ज्ञाः॥ (Charaka Chikitsa Sthana 26/3)

Acharya Charaka described ten seats of *Prana* in Sharira Sthana, Chapter 7 (7/9); he defined the first six as *Marmas*.

दश प्राणायतनिः; तद्धथा - मूर्धा, कण्ठः, ह्रदयं, नाभिः, गुदं, बस्तिः, ओजः, शुक्रं, शोणतिं, मांसमिति ।

तेषु षट् पूर्वाणि मर्मसंख्यातानि ॥ (Charaka Sharira Sthana 7/9) He also stated in Sutra Sthana, Chapter 29 (29/3) (Dashapranayataniya addhyaya) that there are only ten seats, where Prana (vital life force) may be found, namely, two temporal bones (Shankha), three Marmas (heart, bladder, and head), throat (Kantha), blood (Rakta), semen (Sukra), Oja, and anorectal area (Guda).

दशैवायतनान्याहुः प्राणा येषु प्रतिष्ठिताः ।

शंखौ मर्मत्रयं कण्ठो रक्तं शुक्राज्सी गुदम् ॥ (Charaka Sutra Sthana 29/3)

Acharya Charaka explains three types of ailments in Sutra Sthana Chapter 11 (11/48): *Shakha* (periphery), *Marmasthisandhi* (vital areas associated with bones and joints), and *Koshtha* (central body) (stomach and intestine). He, further, emphasizes that *Marmas* are comprised *Basti* (urinary bladder), *Hridaya* (heart), and *Murdha* (head), that is, *Trimarmas*, and that is the disease's intermediate passage.

त्रयो रोगमार्गा इति - शाखा, मर्मास्थसिन्धयः, कोष्ठश्च । (Charaka Sutra Sthana 11/48)

In Siddhi Sthana 9 (9/5), Acharya Charaka emphasizes the significance of *Trimarmas*. He claimed that if any of the three *Marmas* is broken, it causes the entire body to break down quickly; this is because if the substratum is destroyed, then its dependent is also destroyed; their affliction causes severe illnesses to arise.

तेषां त्रयाणामन्यतमस्यापि भेदादाश्चेव शरीरभेद: स्यात, आश्रयनाशादाश्रतिस्यापविनिाशः; तदुपधातात्तुघोरतरव्याधिप्रादुर्भाव : ॥ (Charaka Siddhi Sthana 9/5)

#### Sushruta Samhita

The "Father of Indian Surgery," Acharya Sushruta, is regarded as such. When it came to *Shalya Chikitsa*, he placed a high value on *Marmas* (surgery). He described *Marmas* in detail, including their types, numbers, locations, measurements, anatomical structure, and relationship to *Panchamahabhutas*, injury symptoms, and treatment options. As "*Pratyeka Marma Nirdesham Shaariram*," he devotes an entire chapter to *Marmas* in Sharira Sthana (Chapter 6).<sup>[1]</sup>

# Ashtanga Hridaya

Ashtanga Hridaya contains a comprehensive reference on Marma. In Ashtanga Hridaya's Sharira Sthana, Chapter 4 (*Marma Vibhagam Shariram*), Laghu Vagbhattalso mentioned about the *Marma*.<sup>[2]</sup>

# Ashtanga Sangraha<sup>[22,23]</sup>

In Chapter 7 of Ashtanga Sangraha's Sharira Sthana, Vriddha Vagbhatta defines *Marma*. He conveyed the same perspective as Acharya Sushruta in this chapter; the only variation between the two is the structural classification. Along with other varieties of *Marmas*, he added "Dhamani Marma".

In the Ashtanga Sangraha Sharira 5/59, Acharya Vagbhatta mentions ten *Pranayatana* in the body. Seven of the ten *Pranayatanas* are known as "*Mahamarmas*" (very important *Marmas*) (Ashtanga Sangraha Sharira 5/60).

दश प्राणायतानि मूर्धा जिह्वाबन्धनं कण्ठो ह्रदयं नाभिर्बस्तिगुद : शुकरमोजो रकतम ।

एषामाद्धानि सप्त पुनर्महामर्मसंज्ञानि ॥ (Astanga Sangra Sharira Sthana 5/59.60)

# Vashishtha Samhita<sup>[24]</sup>

The Vashishtha Samhita (Chapter 3) describes *Pratyahara* as the *Dharana* (concentration) on the eighteen *Marma* places that are the seats of *Prana*.

# Kashyap Samhita<sup>[25]</sup>

The entire number of *Marmas* was accepted by Acharya Kashyapa as 107; however, like Acharya Charaka, he placed greater emphasis

on three *Marmas*, in which he referred to as "Mahamarmani" in Sharira Sthana, Chapter 4.

# Sharangadhara Samhita<sup>[26]</sup>

In Chapter 5 of Purva Khanda, Acharya Sharangadhara mentioned the total number of *Marmas* as 107 (Kaladikhyanam). He described *Marmas* as the foundation of life (5/39).

# Bhava Prakasha[27,28]

In Purva Khanda Chapter 3 (Garbha Prakarana Addhyaya), Acharya Bhava Mishra presented a full account of *Marma*, which is comparable to Acharya Sushruta's viewpoint. *Prana* (vital life force) is said to be predominantly present in *Marmas* (3/223).

# Madhav Nidana<sup>[29]</sup>

In Chapter 43 of Saddyovrana Nidana Adhyaya, Acharya Madhava described the several varieties of *Marmas*, as well as their general and special *vedhana* (*Marma-viddha*) *lakshanas*.

# Yogaratnakara<sup>[30]</sup>

In Uttarardha, Saddyovrana Nidana Adhyaya – 18–19, Yogaratnakara highlighted the general symptoms of *Marmakshata* (damage or trauma that occurs in five forms of *Marma*).

# Latest Innovation in Marma - As Marma Chikitsa

Marma science and Marma therapy are an untouched chapter of Indian surgery. With the exploration of Marma science, the whole scenario of Indian surgery may change in multidimensional approaches. Yoga was used in the past to help people advance spiritually. As of today, the World Health Organization, scientists, and the general public all accept the benefits of yoga. In the same way, the hidden treasure of Vedic surgical skill in terms of Marma therapy is ready to cope up with the challenge of present time.

Nowadays, yoga is tool for the health promotion in mass and the best way to combat with the most of the diseases from which man suffers. In the same way, implementation of *Marma* therapy may be help in different medical and surgical lesions in many ways. Till date, the knowledge of *Marma* science is not well known to the practitioners of Ayurveda. Hence, this science cannot be flourished like other specialties of Ayurveda. These *Marmas* are mentioned and discussed in Sushrut Samhita as anatomical consideration of different part of the body.

By one aspect physical and spiritual gains are possible with *Marma* science; in other way, the misuse of the *Marma* science may be fatal. Any unprecedented efforts may lead to complication and adverse effect or death, so *Marma* science was obscure and hidden for a longer period of thousands of years. It was the main aim of obscuring the *Marma* science. In the present time, hidden treasure of Vedic surgical skill can help a lot to suffering humanity. It is supposed to be an extra ordinary method of healing in many neurological and orthopedic surgical and non-surgical lesions. Many traumatic bony lesions, soft-tissue lesions, and nerve lesions are also can be treated by this therapy.

Identification of *Marma* is important aspect of *Marma* therapy without knowing the actual location of *Marma* point which is very difficult to get the desired effect. As we know that with the help

of keyboard, we can insure the different function of computer; in the same way, the *Marma* point located all over body may help to regulate and stimulate the function of body and brain.

Maharshi Sushrut has extensively discussed the different classification of *Marma* points and effect of trauma on these points. There is no clear cut description of therapeutic importance of *Marma* available in Ayurvedic literature. The idea of therapeutic use of *Marma* points come by the description of traumatic effect of different *Marma* points as discussed in Sushrut Samhita.

Retrograde research and study was done and got the clue to treat the ailments. For example, trauma to *Krikatika Marma* may lead to *Chalmurdha* (abnormal movement of the head), so it was thought that in different condition and diseases, where the abnormal movement of the head is apparent, stimulation of *Krikatika Marma* helps a lot. This concept/hypothesis was tried for last many years in reference to *Marma* points. This practice of *Marma* simulation opened to new horizon for the suffering humanity.

# Need of Practical Applicability in Musculoskeletal Disorders

Marma therapy is capable of providing temporary relief in most of musculoskeletal disorders such as *Grudhrasi* (Sciatica), *Sandhigata vata* (Osteoarthritis), *Amavata* (Rheumatoid arthritis), *Avabahuka* (Frozen shoulder), and many such diseases, where pain is main presenting complains and when used for long time period, continuously, in appropriate manner, this therapy is capable of curing the disease completely. *Marma* therapy is non-invasive technique so can be used in patients unfits for other treatment option due to systemic illness or any other cause and can be used as single therapy or as an adjuvant therapy, along with medications to provide relief in pain.

# Conclusion

Marma is an important topic discussed in Ayurveda, which has extreme significance with regards to surgeries and is also the basis for Marma therapy, an effective therapeutic procedure. With a view to explore the foundational elements of the Science of Marma, the present article gives an account of various ancient/classical Indian scriptures that mention different aspects of this Science. It is observed that the knowledge of Marmas existed ever since the Vedic age, and this knowledge was being extensively used for various purposes such as warfare, self-defense, and surgery. Both the spiritual aspects and complete anatomical description of Marmas are available in these scriptures.

#### **Leads or Recommendations**

It is need of an hour to generate the clinical evidences on *Marma* therapy in musculoskeletal and mental disorders as far as the practice of *Marma* science is concerned.

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