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’

Whereas the Chinese system of medicine, Acupuncture, is based upon a similar concept of bio-energetic channels in the form of ‘meridians’.

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), Rakamokshan (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
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 Prana (the components of life or vital energy) resides or flows through. 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 jeevasthan 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.

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. 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 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 marma. The severity based classification of marma 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
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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marma type</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Dosha Predominance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadhyopranhar</td>
<td>Agneya</td>
<td>Pitta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalantarpranhar</td>
<td>Saumya-Agneya</td>
<td>Kapha, Pitta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaikalyakar</td>
<td>Saumya</td>
<td>Kapha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vishalyaghna</td>
<td>Vayavya</td>
<td>Pitta, Vata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rujakar</td>
<td>Agneya-Vayavya</td>
<td>Vata</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 dhamaṇi, 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 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. 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. Marma practitioners as Dr. Sunil Joshi have noticed that stimulation of specific marmas is useful for a specific group of conditions:

- **Kshipra, Talhridaya, Kurcha, Kurchashira, 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, Kurchashora, Manibandha, Indrabasti, Kurpara, Bahi, Ani, Dhamani, Matrika, Krikatika, Amsa and Amsaphalaka marmas** are useful in the treatment of torticollis and cervical spondylosis.
- **M arma 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 psychological 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 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.

**REFERENCES**


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