Exploring the Science of Marma - An Ancient Healing Technique: Its mention in Ancient Indian Scriptures

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Abstract. The complex science of Marma holds an extremely important place in Ayurveda. The Marmas are specific anatomical locations in body through which vital life/bio energies of the human body flows. To be more specific, a Marma point is defined as an anatomical site where muscles, veins, ligaments, bones and joints meet together. These are very important places, serving as the ‘seats of life’ (Prana - the vital life force). Any injury to these parts may lead to severe pain, disability, loss of function, loss of sensation and death. Therefore, it has been stated in the scriptures that these vital points should not be injured, and should be kept intact even while performing surgeries. Recent research indicate that if any Marma point is inflamed or painful, then stimulating its nearby Marma points can help in alleviating this pain. Several studies and texts have reported the therapeutic benefits of Marma Therapy in treating various physical and mental disorders. Looking at the importance of Marma Science with regards to surgeries, as well as their recent use and future possibilities as an effective therapeutic procedure, the present study was undertaken for an in-depth study of the Science of Marma. The present article, which is Part-1 of this study, gives an account of various ancient / classical Indian scriptures, including the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Epics, Samhitas, etc., that mention different aspects of the Science of Marma. Both the spiritual aspects and complete anatomical description of Marmas are available in these scriptures. It is observed that the knowledge of Marmas was being extensively used for various purposes like warfare, self-defense, surgery, etc., ever since the Vedic age.

Keywords. Ayurveda, Marma Science, Marma Therapy, Ancient Scriptures, Veda, Upanishad, Samhita, Purana

Introduction

Marma is an extremely important topic discussed in Ayurveda. Marma point is defined as anatomical site where muscles, veins, ligaments, bones and joints meet together (Sushruta Samhita Sharira Sthana 6/16) (1). According to Acharya Sushruta there are 107 marmas in human body (Sushruta Samhita Sharira Sthana 6/3) (1). These are very important vital places, that are the ‘seats of life’ (Prana - the vital life force) (Ashtanga Hridaya Sharira Sthana 4/2) (2). Any injury to these
parts may lead to severe pain, disability, loss of function, loss of sensation and death (3). It plays an important role in surgery; therefore, it is called ‘Shalya Vishayardha’ (fifty percent of the entire science of surgery) (Sushruta Samhita ShariraSthana 6/35) (1). Acharya Sushruta states that Marmasthana, a very vital point, should not be injured and should be kept intact even while doing surgeries (Sushruta Samhita ShariraSthana 6/21) (1).

However, recent researches indicate that if any Marma point is inflamed or painful, then stimulating its nearby Marma points can help in alleviating this pain (4). Several studies and texts have reported the therapeutic benefits of Marma Therapy in treating various physical and mental disorders (3-23).

Looking at the importance of the Marma Science with regards to surgeries, as well as their recent use and future possibilities as an effective therapeutic procedure, the present study has been undertaken for an in-depth study of the Science of Marma.

The Science of Marma has been described in detail in various ancient / classical Indian texts including the Vedas, Upanishadas, Puranas, Samhitas, etc. (3-10,22-35). The present article, which is Part-1 of this study, gives an account of various ancient / classical Indian scriptures that mention different aspects of the Science of Marma.

**Marma in Vedas**

**Rigveda**

Rigveda mentions the use of varma or protective covering for providing protection to the marmas (7). It also states that the best form of protection (varma) for the marmas is prayer or mantra, which is indicative of the spiritual aspects of this ancient science (7).

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The verses 8/3/14, 8/3/17 and 11/12/26 given above talks about protecting the marma points by a protective shield or body armor.
Agni (fire) was used as the ultimate weapon to destroy marma.
The verses 8/5/7, 8/5/18 and 8/5/19 mention protecting one's body parts with varma (protective shield or body armor).

आथवरिररात् तरसरदवरमरनु य जा उत। ओषधय: पजायने यदा ल्प्राण बिन्नस्ि॥ - Atharvaveda 11/6/16 (37)

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 cultivated by human beings, are manifested.

Prana is the vital life force that governs all the physical and subtle processes of a living being (38-41). Marmas are the seats of Prana - verse 11/6/16 given above states the importance of Prana.

Marma in Upanishadas
Several Upanishadas like Shandilyopanishada, Garbhopanishada, Kshurikopanishada, etc. provide information about the conceptual and anatomical aspects of marma points.

Garbhopanishada
"समोतं मर्मशतं" - Garbhopanishada 5 (42)

Garbhopanishada states that the human body consists of 107 marmas (weak or sensitive spots) (according to verse 5 given above), 180 suturesor junction points, 109 snayu (ligaments), 700 sira (channels), 500 majja (muscle), 360bones, and forty five million hairs (42).

Shandilyopanishada
अणायाताः मर्मस्थानेऽः क्रमादारण प्रत्याहारः। - Shandilyopanishada 1/8/1 (43)

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 eighteen marma locations is called pratyahara.

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, murdhni - on all these locations pratyahar should be done in the order of going up and down.

Kshurikopanishada
पादां गुल्फान्ता रजः प्राणभूता रजः रात्रां तद्गुल्फान्तां त्रायते। - Kshurikopanishada 12 (43)

Meaning - Contemplate upon 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 dhyanbal (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

संस्कृतम् न च चतुर्थम् अर्द्धम् ।
न संवेदृत्तैः सुतकृचिनः कर्तव्यस्ते ॥
- Kurma Purana Uparivibhage 2/16/33 (44)

Kurma Purana mentions that the touching of marma points is prohibited (44).

Agni Purana

In chapter 370 (ShariraAvayava- parts of the body) of Agni Purana (45,46), 10 locations have been mentioned where the Prana resides - Murdha, Hridaya, Nabhi, Kantha, Jihvaa, Shukra, Rakta, Guda, Vasti, Gulpha - all these are marma points, as these are the seats of Prana.

Marma in Brahmanas

Brahmana Gratha like Shatapatha Brahmana describe the important marma locations, i.e. the navel, head and heart, as well as various Pranas, Dhatus and body organs (7).

Marma in Epics

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

Ramayana

ततो मर्मसु मर्मस्य मज्जिनिःशिशंसांसारन् ।
रामलक्षणकोशीसर ननाद च मृत्तं ॥
- 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 (47).

Mahabharata

The great epic Mahabharata contains many references of marma or varma (Bhishma Parva 114/56, 119/5, 119/47, 119/61, 119/65) (48), (Drona Parva 92/7, 92/22), (Karna Parva 19/61), (Shalya Parva 32/63, 36/64), etc. (49).

It mentions the use of protective coverings for the marmas of both the soldiers, and the animals used in warfare like the elephants and horses (7). Warriors were capable of using their Prana and Mantras for empowering the fighting instruments (like arrows) with the natural forces like fire (7). There were several great warriors who could only be defeated if their marma points were destroyed (7).

Marma in Samhitas

The description about the number of marmas, their location, structures involved, along with the detailed explanation of marmaghata or viddhalakshanas and diseases is given in almost all the classical texts written during Samhita kala. All the Acharyas accepted that the total number of marmas is 107.
Charaka Samhita
Acharya Charaka has assigned great importance to Trimarmas, i.e., Basti, Hridaya and Shirah; he has also accepted the total number of marmas to be 107 in (Charaka Siddhi Sthana 9/1) and (CharakaChikitsaSthana 26/3) (50).

In ShariraSthana, Chapter 7 (7/9), Acharya Charaka told about ten seats of Prana; out of these, he considered the first six as marmas (50).

Also in Sutra Sthana, Chapter 29 (29/3) (Dashapranayataniyaaddhyaya), he said that there are only ten seats where prana (vital life force) is located, i.e., two temples (shankha), three marmas (heart, bladder and head), throat (kantha), blood (rakta), semen (shukra), oja, anorectal region (guda) (50).

In Sutra Sthana, Chapter 11 (11/48), Acharya Charaka has explained three passages of diseases - shakha (periphery), marmasthisandhi (vital spots along with bones and joints) and koshtha (stomach and intestine). Further he clarifies that marmas include basti (urinary bladder), hridaya (heart) and murdha (head), i.e., Trimarmas, and this is the middle passage of diseases (50).
Pranayatana, seven are called as ‘Mahamarmas’ (very important marmas) (Ashtanga Sangraha Sharira 5/60) (51).

Vashishtha Samhita
Vashishtha Samhita (Chapter 3) mentions eighteen marma locations that are the seats of Prana, and describes Pratyahara as the Dharana (concentration) on these marmas (53).

Kashyapa Samhita
Acharya Kashyapa accepted total number of marmas as 107; however, just like Acharya Charaka, he gave more importance to three marmas, which he mentioned as ‘Mahamarmani’ in ShariraSthana, Chapter 4 (54).

Sharangadhara Samhita
Acharya Sharangadhara mentioned total number of marmas as 107 in Chapter 5 of Purva Khanda (Kaladikhyanam). He told marmas as the base of life (5/39) (55).

Bhava Prakasha
Acharya Bhava Mishra gave a detailed description of Marma in Purva Khanda Chapter 3 (GarbhaPrakaranaAddhyaya), which is similar to the views of Acharya Sushruta. He told that Prana (vital life force) primarily resides in Marmas (3/223) (56,57).

Madhava Nidana
Acharya Madhava gave the types of Marmas, as well as their general and specific lakshanas of vedhana (Marma-viddda) in SaddyovranaNidanaAdhyaya, Chapter 43 (58).

Yogaratnakara
Yogaratnakara mentioned the general symptoms of Marma-kshata (injury or trauma that occur in five types of marma) in Uttarardha, SaddyovranaNidanaAdhyaya -18,19 (59).

Conclusion
Marma is an important topic discussed in Ayurveda, having 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 like warfare, self-defense, surgery, etc. Both the spiritual aspects and complete anatomical description of Marmas are available in these scriptures.

The description about the number of marmas, their location, structures involved, correlation with Panchamahabhutas, classification, along with the detailed explanation of marmaghata or viddhalakshanas (effect of trauma) is given in classical texts written during Samhita kala. These will be covered in detail in Part-2 of the exploration of the Science of Marma.

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Compliance with ethical standards
The authors have maintained necessary ethical standards while conducting the research.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.
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