

MARMA THERAPY AND YOGIC PRACTICES IN PAIN MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Marma are vital centres or subtle energy fields of the body. *Marmas* are important aspect in yogic practices with which *ayurveda* is closely connected. *Marmas* are related to the 7 *chakras* (energy centre) and 14 *nadis*(subtle channel)systems emphasized in yogic thought. *Yoga* not only has a sophisticated system of physical postures, it also recognizes the power of *Prana*(life force) which is reflected through the *marma* points on the surface of the body. Through manipulation of *marmas* via yogic practices, *prana* can be directed to remove blockages, improve energy flow or tap hidden energy reserves. Pain is a commonly

encountered problem and it is particularly prevalent in elderly age group. Persistent pain may be the result of musculoskeletal conditions, neuropathic conditions, malignancy and its treatment, trauma or limb amputation, surgery or other invasive procedures/therapies are also associated with pain. *Marma* Therapy and Yogic Practices can be used along with all ayurvedic therapies from detoxification to tonification and rejuvenation from self care to intricate clinical procedure like *Panchkarma*. The present study is a review article about how *marma* therapy can be used along with yogic practices (i.e. *Asana*, *Pranayamas*, *Pratyahara*) in healthy and diseased individuals for alleviating pain. *Marma* points can be manipulated in *yoga* postures with the help of pressure, heat, needles, massage oils, herbs or aromatic oils and even self *Marma* Therapy which helps to remove the blockages, swelling thus decreasing pain. To popularize *Marma* Therapy it is important to observe the effect of *Marma* Therapy in different orthopedic and neuromuscular diseases in a large scale.

KEYWORDS: *Marma*, *Panchkarma*, *Asana*, *Pranayamas*, *Pratyahara*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is India's traditional healing system, its profound system of mind-body medicine, natural living and yogic health.^[10] The role of *Marma* and its application exists from the Vedic period. Veda unfold the mystery of the primitive man, this is the first documentation compiled, more than 5000 years ago. The word *Marma* dates back to this period.^[6]

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine incorporates within itself not only the techniques of treatment described in the *Samhita* texts but also elaborates structural perspectives in the *Sharirsthana* of *Samhitas*. The *Sharirsthana* of *Sushrut Samhita* outstands among all *Samhitas* in describing even minute details of anatomy. It is only here that Acharya Sushruta has described a very vital topic under '*Marmavigyana*'. *Marmavigyan*, is a science that was preserved and associated largely as a support to martial arts and warfare can now be used and applied for normal healing on a wide range of physical and mental diseases as a result of research and application.

According to Ayurvedic texts, the *Marmas* are the points, which when injured, may be life threatening. *Marmas* are not superficial landmarks on the body surface but these are deep seated important physio-anatomical structures. The juncture of *mamsa*(muscle), *sira*(vessels), *snayu*(tendon, ligament), *asthi*(bones), and *sandhi*(joints) where *Dwadash Prana* take abode is known as *Marma*.^[5] It is also known as *jeevasthan/pranayatana* and is source of energy.(*marmani naam mansa sira snayu asthi sandhi sannipata, tesu swabhavata ev viseshana pranastisthanti, tasmanmarmasu abhikhan styan bhavanapadyante.*).^[4]

Marma points are specific areas on the body which has relation to various internal organs, *doshas*, and *strotas*.^[15] An important principle of *marma* therapy is quite simple, where a strong blow can cause injury, a mild touch can cause healing and this is most important principle of *marma* massage.^[4] As in *Sushrut Samhita* there is description of *siravedha agnikarma* and *kshara karma* as treatment procedures having effect on pathogenesis, may be away from that areas.^[5] Likewise *marma* points are specific areas on the body having inter relation with various internal organs and *strotas* therefore leading to control (suppression or stimulation) of these system by *marma* points.^[15]

There is no direct mention of therapeutic use of *Marma* Therapy in Ayurvedic texts. But *Marma* Therapy has recently evolved a lot and based on utilization of 107 points in the body which are considered as access points to body, mind and consciousness. *Marma* points can be

used to balance the *tridoshas* and *trigunas*. When manipulated, *marmas* can alter both the organic function and structural condition of the body. Through the right use of *marmas* our entire physical and mental energy can be consciously increased, decreased or redirected in a transformative manner.^[18]

Pain is the commonest and biggest problem in human beings. Pain can be explained in terms of symptoms underlying another disease or complications of the other disease. The word disease itself symbolizes a painful condition. Pain can be described as any physical suffering or discomfort caused by illness or injury. Ayurveda explains the origin of pain is due to vitiated *vata dosha*, once *vata dosha* is treated efficiently the pain subsides automatically.

Marma are also an important aspect of the science of *yoga*, with which *ayurveda* is closely connected. *Yoga* reflects the physiological view of *Ayurvedic* medicine with its *doshas*, tissue, and channel systems, including the role of *marmas*. Its aim is to lift awareness to a higher consciousness that transcends pain and suffering,^[10] towards this goal, the science of *yoga* employs many practices and techniques. *Asana* or *yoga* posture work on our physical body to release stress, eliminate toxins and balance our physical energies. This is followed by internal methods of *Pranayama* (breath control) and *Pratyahara* (control of the senses) to calm and balance our vital energy.^[13]

Marmas are related to the *chakra* and *nadis*(subtle channel) systems, emphasized in yogic practices. *Yoga* not only has a sophisticated system of physical postures, it also recognizes the power of *prana* or the life-force which is reflected through the *marma* points on the surface of the body. An understanding of *marmas* can add efficacy to any level or type of yogic practice whether using the body, the breath or the mind. This makes it an important tool of energetic/pranic healing.^[13]

DISCUSSION

The word *Marma* is of Sanskrit origin, “*Mrin Maranae*”. The Sanskrit phrase, “*Maryatae Asminiti Marma*” means there is possibility of death or serious damage to health when these points got injured.”^[16]

Skill of human being lies in his efficiency to perform various actions with his hand. *Acharya sushruta* has mentioned, “*Hastamevam Pradhanatamam Yantram*” (which means human hand is the most important instrument).^[15]

During marma therapy, an extremely light stimulation of points on the body is applied by hand. This gets rid of the obstruction from that vital point and provides physical and psychological recreation and potency. *Marma* therapy is a dominant process and a therapy that works with these subtle and responsive liveliness points to unlock the energy outlets in the body are called *Srotsas*. *Marma* points when gently pressed on the skin can stimulate a chain of positive events.^[18]

Marma therapy contributes to increase or recharge physical, mental, and spiritual energies. On physical level it helps to revitalize the body tissue; at cellular level, it improves the vital functions like digestion, respiration, blood circulation and excretion. On the psychosomatic level it improves the mental faculty by directing it in the positive direction. It harmonizes the functioning of nervous and endocrine system to control psychological disorders. On the spiritual level, reasoning of mind, regulation and transformation of thoughts in positive direction helps to concentrate towards the ultimate goal of life. As a preventive measure it helps to cope with situations arising from different diseases.^[13]

Different procedures/methods in *Marma* Therapy

1. Deep breathing & holding of air the chest, upper respiratory tract & mouth. This stimulates the 37 *marmas* of head and neck.
2. Posturing of body: examples are to be drawn from normal human postures which are adopted by human beings in day to day life like inter-digital pose, cross hand and cross leg pose as well as *yogasana* in which stimulation of *marma* points is inherent.
3. Pressure over *marma* points, vibrating, pinching, & lifting the skin layer over the *marma* points & application of medicaments & oil massage over the *marma* points.^[10]

***Marma chikitsa* can be used in the following ways**

- a.) To treat the disease of nerves and brain
- b.) In traumatic, neurological or neuro-surgical lesions ex- traumatic paraplegia
- c.) In orthopedic lesions, especially prolapsed intervertebral disc etc
- d.) To reduce the pain of nerves, muscles, ligaments, bones and joints.
- e.) To produce anaesthesia during any surgical interference.
- f.) To improve the functioning of body organs by achieving homeostasis.
- g.) To activate the mal-developed or deformed body parts or musculature.^[10]

Precautions in Marma Therapy: For effective Marma Therapy, diagnosis of disease & proper technique application is mandatory, it gives prompt results in different kinds of muscular, ligament, joint & nerve pains, tingling sensation, inflammation & heaviness, *marma* therapy gives response in many other diseases in due course of time. It is more effective than the conventional technique like acupressure & others.^[10]

However being a rapid acting technique it should be performed very carefully. Pressure should be exerted on the *sandhi*, *asthi*, *mamsa*, and *snayu marma* but not on *sira marma*. *Sira marma* should be given gentle massage in upward, downward & from center to periphery especially at neck.^[13]

Marmas and the System of Yoga: *Marmas* are key energy centers for the practice of *Yoga* on all levels from yoga postures (*Asanas*) to deep meditation (*Dhyana*). *Yoga* posture affect the energy held in the limbs, joints and spine, which all contain important *marmas*. Certain *marmas* can be manipulated while a person is performing various *Asanas* in order to augment their effects.^[13]

Marmas are connected to the *nadis* (subtle nerves/channels) and *chakras* (energy centers) of the subtle body and mind. Through using *marmas* we can restore the proper connection between the subtle body (our internal energy, moods and emotions) & the physical body resulting in increased health and vitality on both levels.^[13]

Marma, Chakras and Nadis: There are three levels of energy centers that link the body to the mind and higher consciousness- the 07 chakras, the 14 *nadis* and the 107 *marmas*. *Marmas* distribute the *prana* from the *chakras* and the *nadis* throughout the body as a whole.

Marma and seven chakras.^[13]

Sr No.	Chakra	Nadi and bodily system	Marma
1.	Muladhara	Alambusha nadi , excretory system	Guda
2.	Svadhithana	Kuhu nadi, Urogenital system	Kukundara, Vitap
3.	Manipura	Vishvodhara nadi, Digestive system	Nabhi
4.	Anahata	Varuna nadi, Circulatory system	Hridaya
5.	Vishuddha	Saraswati nadi, respiratory system	Nila, manya, amsa
6.	Ajna	Ida, pingla, pusha, gandhari, payasvini nadi, nervous system	Sthapani, Apanga
7.	Sahastrasar	Susuhmna nadi, brain	Adhipati, Simanta

By treating their respective *marmas*, we can treat the *nadis*, elements, sense and motor organs, and other factors associated with the *chakras*. Ex- through treating the *marmas* in the region of the navel, one can work on the fire element in the body, including the digestive fire (*agni*) and organs of the digestive system, the sense of sight and the feet as the motor organ.^[13]

Marma and Asana Practice: As a rule a healthy mind lives in a healthy body & these postures give a positive effect on health and may cure a number of diseases thus decreasing pain and sufferings. One of the main purposes of the *Asana* practice (yoga posture) is to insure the right flow of *prana* through the various *marma* regions. As many *marmas* are located in the joints, asana help to keep the *marmas* clear and energized. Due to different anomalies/ailments the related *marmas* behave in different ways, they turn into stiff, tender, cool, hot, pulsatile, swollen, rough, uneven or depressed areas. This shows that these are affected *marma* points. Asana aims at bringing better circulation to those *marma* regions that are stiff or tense. All yogic postures in which body is moved forwards & backward affect the *marma* of abdomen, chest & back.^[10]

Sr No.	Asana(posture)	Marma Involved	Useful in ailments
1.	Padmasana/ Lotus Posture	Vitap marma	Inguinal hernia, hydrocele & improves function of urogenital system
2.	Siddhasana/Adept's/ Proficient Posture	Guda & Basti marma	Cures anorectal & urogenital disorders
3.	Gomukhasana/ Cow's head Posture	Marmas of back, thorax & abdomen along with both extremities	Helps remove muscular pains in back & shoulder, cures abdominal weakness, alleviates indigestion
4.	Sarvangasana/ Shoulder stand posture	Amsa, amsaphalak, vrihati, parvasanshi, stanamula, stanarohita, apalapa, hridaya & other marmas of HNF	Strengthens entire body, regulates functions of thyroid & parathyroid glands
5.	Halasana/ Plough Posture	Amsa, amsaphalak, vrihati, parvasanshi, krukatika, hridaya & other marmas of HNF	Tones spinal nerves, muscles of back & sympathetic nervous system.
6.	Pavanmuktasana/ Wind-releasing posture	Vitap, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi & thorax	Improves indigestion & reduces abdominal fat. Positive effect in IBS
7.	Matsyasana/ Fish pose	Kakshadhara, vitap, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi, thorax	Expands chest, strengthens lungs & brings oxygenated blood to thyroid.
8.	Bhujangasana/ Cobra pose	Kakshadhara, vitap, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi, thorax, upper limbs	Expands chest, strengthens lungs & heart, awakens kundalini
9.	Dhanurasana/ Bow Posture	Vitap, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi & thorax, back and both extremity marma	Strengthen spine, intestine, liver & kidney, improves digestion, reduces fat

10.	<i>Chakrasana/</i> Wheel Posture	<i>Vitap, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi &</i> thorax, back and both extremity	Affects whole body, esp spine, strengthen upper & lower limbs
11.	<i>Ardha</i> <i>matsyendrasana/</i> Half spinal twist pose	<i>Vitap, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi &</i> thorax, back and both extremity <i>marmas</i>	Retards aging, tones the nervous system, & strengthen the reproductive glands.
12.	<i>Bhadrasana/</i> Nobility posture	<i>Vitapa, lohitaaksha, basti, nabhi,</i> <i>guda</i>	Relieves urinary disorders & sciatic pains, keeps kidneys, prostate, bladder & ovaries functioning properly.
13.	<i>Mandukasana/</i> Frog Posture	<i>Basti, nabhi, lohitaaksha, vitap &</i> <i>marma</i> of thorax back and both limbs	Improves function of pancreas, improves amount of insulin & gastric & liver secretions
14.	<i>Mayurasana/</i> Peacock Posture	<i>Nabhi, lohitaaksha & marmas</i> of thorax, back and both upper & lower limbs	Alleviates indigestion & constipation, helpful for diabetes, hemorrhoids & inflammation of intestine/liver
15.	<i>Vajrasana/</i> Thunderbolt posture	<i>Vitap, lohitaaksha, basti & marmas</i> of both extremities	Calms mind, aids digestion
16.	<i>Sarvangasana/</i> Relaxation posture	Soothing total body <i>marmas</i>	Facilitates blood circulation relieves fatigue & reduces stress and depression

Marmas, Pranayama and Pratyahara

Pranayama; *Marmas* as *pranic* centres can be easily affected through *pranayama*, we can increase the flow of *prana* through the *chakras, nadis & marmas*. Ex. *Bhastrika pranayama* is used to open the *marmas* in the region of head.

Pratyahara: It is fifth of the 8 limbs of yoga and it mediates between the outer factors of *yoga*-specifically *asana* that works upon the physical factor of body and the inner factor of *yoga*-specifically *dhyana*/meditation that works upon mind. The great yogic text, ‘*Vasishta Samhita*’, contains an important section explaining the use of specific *marmas* for the practice of *pratyahara*. It states, “great yogis ever praise *pratyahara* as concentration(*dhyana*) on the 18 *marma* places that hold *prana*. Drawing the *prana* from each of these places is said to be the best form of *pratyahara*.^[13]

18 yogic marma regions and corresponding marmas.^[13]

1. Toes – *kshipra marma*
2. Ankles- *Gulpha marma*
3. Middle of calf- *Indrabasti marma*
4. Root of knee- not classical *marma* but can also be used.
5. Centre of knee- *janu marma*
6. Middle of thigh- *urvi marma*
7. Anus- *guda marma*

8. Middle of hip- *kukundara and nitambha marma*
9. Root of urethra- *vitap marma*
10. Navel- *nabhi marma*
11. Center of heart- *hridaya marma*
12. Base of throat- *nila marma*
13. Root of tongue- *shringataka marma*
14. Root of nose- *phana marma*
15. Centre of eyes- *apanga marma*
16. Middles of brows- *stapani marma*
17. Centre of forehead- not a classical *marma*
18. Top of head- *Adhipati marma*

Concept of pain in Ayurveda and its management by Marma Therapy and Yogic Practices: Pain is the most common feature of traumatic lesions and understanding its nature and properties is important for the successful management of pain. *Marma* therapy and system of *yoga* has an answer to this hence, if we incorporate *marma* science in the broad field of ayurveda we can overcome this lacuna.

Pain is a psychical response of an imperative protective reflex. Pain is produced by stimuli exceeding the intensity threshold for sensory nerve endings. The nervous impulses are produced by the stimulation of peripheral receptors, which is inferred as pain within the higher cerebral centers. Such type of nervous activity may be produced by a number of physical phenomenon, i.e. pressure, squeezing, tension, tearing, punching and by change of temperature, cold and hot, or chemical effects such as the change of pH i.e. concentration of histamine-like substances, bradykinin, serotonin and other polypeptide compounds.^[10]

In *ayurveda*, *vedana*, *dukha*, *pida*, *sula*, *ruk*, *ruja*, *beda*, *sadana*, *avasada*, are words used for pain. According to *Sushruta samhita* the main causative factor of pain is *vata*. The seat of pain is *mana* (psyche) and *sharira* (body).^[5,10]

Instant pain relief is the motive of *marma* therapy. Stimulation of *marma* can produce analgesia by secreting a number of prostaglandin inhibitors, endorphins, interferon and other opioid- like substances which are hundred times more potent than opium. Instant pain relief is possible within no time.^[10]

Following *marma* points are responsible for pain relief in different organs

1. Shoulder pain- *kshipra & kurpara marma*
2. Pain in abdomen- *Kurpara & urvi marma*
3. Chest pain- *kurpara, urvi, ani marma*
4. Cervical pain- *kshipra, kurpara, ani marma*
5. Leg and knee pain- *Kshipra & gulpha marma*
6. Sciatic pain- *Kshipra, Gulpha marma*

CONCLUSION

We can therefore see the close and astounding inter-relationship between the two practices, the practice of *marma* being inherent in the yogic postures. In all higher yogic practices as well as concentration/ meditation on the *chakras* various *marma* points get affected & stimulated thus it can be remarked extending this perception that self *marma* therapy in itself can be considered as yogic practice.

Due to injury all the stimulation from body to brain carry negative energy, *marma* therapy converts the feeling of illness into feeling of joy. Regular *marma* therapy can provide all benefits of *yoga*, *pranayama*, aerobics and other physical exercise.

Pain management aims at minimizing the distress, feeling of unrest and improving the quality of life. A cardinal point in the management of pain is that it should be holistic and patient centered in its application. This can be fulfilled in the Ayurvedic approach only in terms of *marma chikitsa* and yogic practice.

Lastly we can summarize that *marma* therapy and yogic practices as a system with dual advantage of disease control with instant symptomatic response and permanent cure without adverse effect. In this way, with *marma* science we can promote health and vitality for daily life and obtain freedom from disease, suffering and disharmony.

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