



Review Article

MARMA THERAPY-AN EMERGING NON-INVASIVE MODALITY

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ABSTRACT

Chronic musculoskeletal disorders are topic of concern for all available systems of treatment. Incidence of musculoskeletal disorders is increasing due to life style changes. Advancement in the field of trauma and acute cases management is commendable in the contemporary science but in case of chronic musculoskeletal disorders there are limited options such as NSAIDS, steroids etc. So there is always a thirst for more options. *Marma* therapy is capable of curing the chronic musculoskeletal diseases when practiced by skilled expert.

Marma therapy is non-invasive modality of treatment in which calculated amount of pressure is applied to vital points called *Marma* in order to relieve pain. Acharya Sushruta has given detailed description of *Marma* in *Pratyek Marmanirdeshsharir* chapter of *Sharir Sthana* of Sushruta Samhita.

Present study is an effort to provide the basic information with indications and methods of application of *Marma* therapy as this technique is non-invasive still effective in providing temporary as well as permanent relief in signs and symptoms of chronic musculo-skeletal disorders. Detailed review of literature including *Brihatrayi* along with available articles on the topic under consideration was done for critical analysis of proposed concepts.

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INTRODUCTION

Chronic musculoskeletal disorders are topic of concern for all available systems of treatment. *Marma* therapy is non-invasive, instantly effective technique to relieve pain due to various musculoskeletal disorders. Review of literature shows the existence of this technique in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat* period. Reference of *Marma* science can be found in all three treatise of *Brihatrayi- Trimarmiya Siddhi* chapters in *Charak Samhita*, *Pratyek Marmanirdeshsharir* chapter in *Sushrut Samhita* and *Marmavibhagasharir* chapter in *Ashtanga Hridayam*.^[1,2,3] With the rise and spread of Buddhism the technique also spread in different parts of world with different names such as Tsubo, acupuncture etc. In South India, *Marma* science is popular as *Varmology* and is believed to be developed by *Siddhar Agasthiyar*.^[4] Due to lack of popularity this technique of treatment has remained unexplored like many other Ayurveda concepts although having capacity at par with any other treatment modalities. Present study is

designed with the aim of providing basic idea about *Marma* therapy with detailed description of its types, methods, indications and contraindications.

In depth analysis throws the light on fact that, in *Sushrut Samhita* the explanation was for the purpose of precautionary measure with aim of not injuring the vital structures in surgical and para-surgical procedures whereas science of *Marma* therapy uses the knowledge for therapeutic purposes. The martial arts also uses the basic concepts of *Marma* although the purpose is different that is either for self defence or for injuring others. So the same concepts are utilized in different ways with different names.

Etymology

The word *Marma* is derived from *Mru* which means to kill. The term is indicator of the principle that a strong blow can cause injury; a mild touch can cause healing.^[5]

Definition

Acharya Sushruta defines the word *Marma* as vital points in body which if injured may lead to severe pain, disability, loss of function, loss of sensation or death. *Marma* is junction of *Mansa* (muscle), *Sira* (blood vessels), *Snayu* (ligament and tendons), *Asthi* (bones) and *Sandhi* (joint). *Marmas* are *Panchabhautika* (*Prithivi, Jala, Teja, Vayu, Akash*).^[6] *Marmas* are the places where the *Prana* (life force) is said to be situated. *Acharya Sushruta* explained 107 *Marma* with in depth divisions and sub divisions.

Aims

Present study is designed with primary aim of bringing in light the unexplored technique of Ayurveda which is non-invasive still equally capable of relieving pain of musculoskeletal disorders by providing basic information of performing it and inspiring young intellectual Ayurveda physicians for using the technique in routine practice being secondary aim because this technique is easy, does not require any specific infrastructure.

Types of Marma:

Classification: 1: On the basis of tissue involved *Acharya sushruta* mentioned five types of *Marma* as follows.^[7]

1. *Mansa Marma* (*Marmas* of muscles)
2. *Sira Marma* (*Marmas* of blood vessels)
3. *Snayu Marma* (*Marmas* of ligaments/tendon)
4. *Asthi Marma* (*Marmas* of bones)
5. *Sandhi Marma* (*Marmas* of joints)

Acharya vagbhata mentioned one additional type to this^[8]

Dhamani Marma (*Marmas* of arteries)

Classification: 2 On the basis of effect, *Marma* are classified as follows:

1. *Sadhyopranhar* (causing instant death)
2. *Kalantarpranhar* (causing death within 7 days)
3. *Vaikalyakar* (causing deformity)
4. *Rujakar* (causing severe pain)
5. *Vishalyaghna* (occurrence of death if foreign body is removed stuck in particular *Marma*).

The exact location of *Marma* varies according to an individual, according to the measurement of the body and body parts. The distance is described in finger measurement of the individual. Size of *Marma* varies from pinhead to *Ardhaangula* (half of finger) to *Chaturangula* (4 fingers). The amount of pressure to be applied also varies from *Marma* to *Marma*. So a proper training is required before opting for *Marma* therapy. *Acharyas* practicing *Marma* therapy puts emphasis on the fact that although it appears to be simple

technique it should be done by skilful and trained person otherwise it may lead to adverse effects.

Method

➤ For rendering *Marma* therapy the pressure applied should be optimal with contact time of one cardiac cycle constituted by 0.8 seconds and it should be repeated for 12-20 times (normal respiration per minute).

➤ General rules to be followed during administration of *Marma* therapy-

- Finger nails of both hands should be cut and *Marma* points should not be touched by finger nails.
- Don't talk to others while administering *Marma* therapy.
- Patient should be in seating or supine position.
- *Marma* therapy can be administered on alternate day or daily or four times a day in severe conditions.
- Patient should be neither fasting nor full stomach.
- Preferable time for administration of *Marma* therapy is morning hours.
- There are few dietary restrictions during administration of *Marma* therapy- avoid consumption of curd and greens at night.
- After administration of *Marma* therapy to each patient, it is necessary to touch the wall or any wooden objects before treating the next patient. This is to avoid the transfer of body heat from one patient to another.

➤ **Self Marma therapy**^[9]

- Person can practice, *Marma* therapy on his or her own body. This is termed as self *Marma* therapy. Self *Marma* therapy is best practiced in seating position. The neck and spine should be erect without tilting in any direction.
- Before self-administration of *Marma* therapy pre-therapy exercise is to be done which is as follows.
- After relaxation of body, deep breathing exercises should be done.
- Then with proper perception of *Marma* points, gentle massage is done on *Marma* points and is done with thumb and fingers.

Procedure

- Initially concentrate your mind on *Guda* (anal region), *Nabhi* (umbilicus), *Hridaya* (heart), *Kantha* (junction of thorax and neck), *Bhrumadhya* (middle of the eyes) and top of the head.

- Start pressing the *Marma* in the lower and upper extremities from centre to periphery.
- For a male start from the right side, in the case of a female start from the left side of the body.

RESULT

Marma therapy is capable of providing temporary relief in most of musculoskeletal disorders and permanent relief in few disorders enlisted in this article.

DISCUSSION

- *Marma* science is so much important for a surgeon that it is praised as *Vishayardha* (half of the subject).^[10]
- There are certain very vital anatomical points in the body, which have a secret and significant life values and they are composed of nerves, muscles, blood vessels, joints, ligaments, and bones. It is not necessary that all these structures should be present collectively at a time for the composition of *Marma*. Even if only two structures are present, it may constitute a *Marma* point.^[11]
- *Marma* points are considered to be the places on body surface where *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and *Triguna* (*Satva*, *Raja*, *Tama*) are present together. So stimulation of *Marma* helps in balancing *Tridosha* and *Triguna* leading to restoration of health.^[12]
- *Marma* therapy is used in treatment of various diseases of muscular system, nervous system, locomotor system and blood circulation systems.
- Diseases such as *Grudhrasi* (sciatica), *Sandhigata Vata* (osteoarthritis), *Amavata* (rheumatoid arthritis), *Avabahuka* (frozen shoulder) and many such diseases where pain is main presenting complaint - *Marma* therapy can be used as single therapy or as an adjuvant therapy along with medications to provide relief in pain.
- There is no specific requirement of infrastructure so emerging practitioners can use the technique at OPD level practice.
- *Marma* therapy is a complete science in itself so providing the complete data about it is beyond limitation of this article. Present study may serve as stimulation to young intellectuals of Ayurveda and thus who can undertake clinical trials of the technique under consideration leading to development as well as standardisation of *Marma* Therapy as one of the treatment option for musculoskeletal disorders.

- *Marma* therapy is non-invasive technique so can be used in patients unfit for other treatment options due to systemic illness or any other cause.
- It can also be used with other treatment as an adjuvant therapy and may speed up the relief of symptoms mainly pain.
- Previous studies conducted reveals that when used for long time period, continuously, in appropriate manner this therapy is capable of curing the disease completely. But as the number of studies are few and sample size is small so concluding statement cannot be given. This opens the door for research on large scale and if findings are positive in large sample size then many trainees can be trained in *Marma* therapy which will further be contributing to providing affordable treatment option for musculoskeletal disorders.
- Self *Marma* therapy can be popularised as zero expense therapy.
- Probable mechanism of action of *Marma* therapy

As per *Ayurveda* classics, *Vata Dosha* is responsible for pain. By *Marma* therapy stimulation to vital points leads to pacification of *Vata Dosha*. The process re-channelizes the flow of energy. *Marma* points are considered to be access points to body, mind and consciousness. The therapy under consideration helps to clear the channels (*Srotas*), removes *Ama* (toxins) thus providing relief in various ailments.

CONCLUSION

Clinical trials should be carried out to test the modality under consideration as this is non-invasive as well as free from side effects and can be used in patients unfit for other treatment modalities.

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