



Marma Therapy in Katigraha W.S.R. Low Back Pain

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Relevance of Low back Pain

Low back pain is a very common health problem worldwide and a major cause of disability - affecting performance at work and general well-being. The 2010 Global Burden of Disease Study estimated that low back pain is among the top 10 diseases and injuries that account for the highest number of DALYs worldwide¹. The prevalence rate for children and adolescents is lower than that seen in adults but is rising.^{2,3} Prevalence increases and peaks between the ages of 35 and 55.⁴

Low back pain is the leading cause of activity limitation and work absence throughout much of the world, imposing a high economic burden on individuals, families, communities, industry, and governments.^{2,4} In the United Kingdom, low back pain was identified as the most common cause of disability in young adults, with more than 100 million workdays lost per year.⁵ In the United States, an estimated 149 million work days are lost every year because of low back pain,⁶ with total costs estimated to be US\$ 100 to 200 billion a year.^{7,8} Low Back Pain is the major Work Related Musculoskeletal Disorder among the IT professionals in India⁹. Worldwide, 37% of low

back pain was deemed attributable to occupational risk factors. The fraction varied somewhat among regions (21% - 41%) and was higher in areas with lower health status in general¹⁰

Our great Science of Life "Ayurveda" has withstood the test of time in a glorious manner. The manuscripts/scriptures that are believed to have been written 5000 years ago contain medications and treatment modalities that are potent even today, proved through various scientific parameters of the present era. It is the eternal "Tridosha" and "Panchamahabhoot" Siddhanta that makes our branch of medical science evergreen.

What is Katigraha?

Locomotion is the prime necessity of every human being. Katigraha is one of the Vata vyadhi which affects the lower limb. Even though this disease is not life threatening but it hampers the daily activity of the person. It is neurological as well as musculoskeletal disorder, cardinal features being restricted movements of the spine and pain in low back region.

Diseases related to Vata (one of the Tridoshas besides Pitta and Kapha) are many and presentation of it is in the whole body. Cardinal symptom Vata vitiation is pain which is known as Shula in Sanskrit. “*Vatadrite Rujah Nasti*” This pain is universally understood as a marker of the disease and it is the most common symptom for which a person seeks physician’s advice. Almost all the Acharyas of Ayurved have mentioned 80 *Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhi*. Katigraha is a Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhi described by Sharangadhara¹¹. He has explained it as ‘*Katisthambhana Vedana Vishsha*’ a condition marked by pain and stiffness in the Kati pradesha (Pelvic region). The term Katigraha is explained by Acharya Sodhala as a condition characterised by the vitiated vata either shuddha or with Ama, taking ashraja in the Katipradesha causing Ruja and Graham in the area. We also find brief description of Katigraha as a disease with its etiological factors, symptoms, and treatment in Bhavaprakasha Amvatadhikara¹² and Gadanigraha Vatavyadhiadhikara¹³. Here it is explained as a condition characterized by Shula and restricted movements of Kati caused by Vata. None of the Brihaties have explained Katigraha as a separate disease but have considered it as a symptom in various diseases such as Arshas , Ashmari, Bhagandara, Ajeerna, Kshataksheena, Vatajwara and some other diseases.

What is Marma?

Vyutpatti of word Marma

*Mru maneen jeevasthaane, Sandhistaane taatparye cha*¹⁴

Its meaning is explained as Sandhistanam or Jeevasthanam. Etymologically each letter of the word Marma has got specific meaning. Ma-means Prana or Vayu, Repha denotes house or seat. And hence marma means the site where Prana or vital energy resides.

Definition of Marma

*“Marmaani naama maamsa siraa snaayu asthi sandhi sannipatah; teshu svabhaavata eva praanatishanti”*¹⁵

Acharya Susruta has defined marma as the anatomical site where Mamsa, Sira, Snayu, Sandhi

and Asthi meet together. Also it the site where Prana (Vital energy) of the body resides.

Agni, Soma, Vayu, Satwa, Rajah, Tamah, Bhuthatma and Panchendriyas are called Pranas¹⁶.

It engulfs all basic factors that sustain life

Acharya Charaka has opined that it is the site of Chetana, and hence the sense of pain will be more in this region compared to other parts of the body¹⁷. In Ashtanga Hridaya Acharya Vagbhatt has defined Marma as the site where Mamsa, Sira, Snayu, Asthi, Sandhi and Dhamani confluence¹⁸. He has also said that the sites which are painful, tender and show unbearable throbbing after getting afflicted with an injury should also be considered as Marma Points.

Acharya Sushrut has clearly defined a total of 107 Marmas in our body. The points cover both the front and back of the body , including 22 on the lower extremities (11 in each), 22 on the arms (11 in each), 12 on the Thoracic, Abdominal region anteriorly, 14 on the Back, and 37 on the Head and Neck¹⁹ Marma points are located and measured by the finger widths, called *anguli*. Unlike the tiny, pin-pricked-sized points in comparable therapies like acupuncture, Marma points are relatively large and easy to find. They have also been classified on the basis of the effects they produce when injured into five different categories.

Marma Therapy

Marma Therapy is the precise art of touching an individual in exactly the right place at a critical moment in time, for the purpose of healing. Marmas are the vital points which need utmost care while performing surgical procedures. The details of marma are present not only in our scriptures but also in Vedas ,Upanishads²⁰, and Puranaas apart from our Samhitas Varmam points and Varmalogy has been meticulously described in various Tamil literatures. Also ancient Indian martial arts called *Kalari* utilizes the knowledge of varmam points to a great extent.

Skill of human being lies mainly in his efficiency to perform various actions with his hand. Acharya Susruta has mentioned “*Hastameva pradhaana-*

tamam yantranam" (which means human hand is the most important instrument). Major marma points correspond to the seven chakras, or energy centers of the body, while minor points radiate out along the thorax, abdomen, head, neck and limbs. Marma therapy is an important tool of both disease prevention and disease treatment in Ayurveda. It can be used to balance the doshas, to increase agni (the digestive fire), for detoxification (reduce ama), as well as to promote energy (vajikarana) and aid in rejuvenation (rasayana). It can be part of special clinical methods (like Pancha Karma) but also part of self-care and our daily health regimen²¹. The treatment of marmas, is primarily a matter of therapeutic touch though other methods are also used.

Why Marma Therapy?

India is still a developing country having low socioeconomic population which cannot afford much for ailments causing disabilities. Treatment of such ailments proves costly in Modern medicine as well as in Ayurveda by Shodhana and Shaman.

Despite of a large amount of research in this field, there is uncertainty regarding the best approach for the management of LBP. In allopath system at present it is treated mainly with analgesics²² which have their own side effects. Disc surgery remains the last option when all other strategies have failed, but the outcomes are disappointing²³. Marma Therapy is a strategy to treat LBP after several evidences suggests its quick effectiveness and low economy cost.

How Marma Therapy works

Marma points are specific areas on the body, which has relation through Pranic channels to various internal organs, doshas and srotas. As the technique of massage developed, these points were used to stimulate the internal organs. As in Sushrut Samhita, Siravedha, Agnikarma and Kshara karma have been discussed. In these treatments certain points have been correlated with certain internal organs and doshas. Taking these references into account, Marma therapy has

been developing. One can control (stimulation or suppression) internal organs, doshas and channels through various Marma points. As junction points between consciousness and physiology, they provide a window into interchangeability of energy and matter.

"A Marma point is the junction between physiology and consciousness," says Ed Danaher, Director of the Pancha Karma department at the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Touching a marma point changes the body's biochemistry and can unfold radical, alchemical change in one's makeup. Stimulation of these inner pharmacy pathways signals the body to produce exactly what it needs, including hormones and neurochemicals that heal the body, mind and consciousness says Dr. Vasant Lad²⁴. What we do?

Acharya Charaka says,

"Pareekshaam abhiprashamsanti kushalaah"

A constant re-examination or re-evaluation of every theory or fact is therefore, the very essence of science.

- In our institute at Gurukul Kangri Campus Uttarakhand Ayurveda University we treat many patients of Low Back Ache both on IPD and OPD levels by proper digital stimulation of various Marmas of the lower extremities and back viz
- Kshipra
- Talhridaya
- Gulf
- Indrabasti
- Janu
- Kukundar
- Katikatarun
- Parshvasandhi

Of these also which set of Marmas to be stimulated and the duration of the therapy depends on various factors viz severity, duration, cause of the Low Back Pain. The art and technique of stimulation varies for each of the marma. Care has to be taken for adequate pressure application only

to avoid complications. Identification of each marma is very important for optimum results of the therapy and initially should be done under expert guidance only. Also underlying pathology and cause of Low back pain should be assessed first and treatment protocol adjusted accordingly. The Marmas are stimulated 3-4 times a day. Each marma is stimulated for 20-25 times in one sitting. The rhythm of stimulation is same as the rhythm of our respiration i.e approx 18 times per minute. It can be done both in sitting and supine posture however for optimum results various asanas and postures have been described in various texts. In our clinical practice we find great results in the reduction of pain and also improvement of range of motion and gait of patient by this method. Our most important observation is that in many cases it gives immediate pain relief which so far has been thought to be a lacuna in Ayurveda. This beautiful science has the potential to take care of this so called lacuna.

Unique features and Advantages of this Marma therapy include

- Low cost of treatment
- Medicine-less treatment possible.
- Non invasive technique
- Can also be used in conjunction with other medical treatments – Allopathy, Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Homoeopathy
- Almost no adverse effects or side effects when done properly.
- Rapid Action, Less time consuming and easy to use

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