

Review Article

## **Marma Sharira: The Science of Ayurveda is Contemplate of Martial Art**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Marma* is a vital point or vulnerable spot where *Sira* (veins), *Snayu* (nerves), *Sandhi* (joints), *Mamsa* (muscles), *Asthi* (bones) and *Kandara* (ligament) crosses or connects, which explains *Marmas* as important connection centres or crossroads in the physical body (*Sharira*). Description of 107 *Marmas* given in *Ayurvedic* literature is being classified into five types on the basis of structural involvement in it. In view of the need for quick management for 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 *Kalaripayat* was developed. The knowledge of *Marma* was circulated by the Buddhist monks to other Asian countries especially China, Korea and Japan. And these countries further developed other traditional martial arts like Judo, Karate, Kung-fu etc. or plays accordingly.

**Key word:** *Marma*, *Kalaripayat*, Martial art, Vital point, Vulnerable spot, Karate

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Marma* the word literary communicates the sense of vital parts of the body having importance regarding traumatic effects. In earlier era, this science of *Marma* was more developed for the safety purpose of kings. Attacking to *Marma* was also one of the most important techniques pertaining to location and site during fighting in battle field.

The term *Marma* is first ever traced in Vedic literature of India i.e. *Rigveda*, in connection with warriors ready to go to battlefield. They are advised to make themselves fully equipped with required ornaments to protect the vital parts (*Marma*) of the body by the armour so that they may get the victory without having any injury on his vital part of the body. [1,2] The warriors used these locations or points as target to destroying enemies as well as during

hunting of the wild animals also. These vulnerable points of the body can be used for therapy as well as for incapacitating an opponent. Such an intersection of medicine and martial practices is recognised by Indian institutionalised forms of education. This is exemplified by academic classifications and educational models, which tend to segregate both aspects, labelling one as ‘arts’ or ‘sports’, and the other as ‘science’.

*Ayurveda* described the term *Marma* as vital points of the body which causes death on traumatic injury [3] or pain similar to death [4] or the place of irregular pulsation and pain on pressure [5] and in the sense of *Jivasthana* (seat of life) also. [6] This is representing the juncture of five structures i.e. *Sira* (veins), *Snayu* (nerves), *Sandhi* (joints), *Mamsa* (muscles) and *Asthi* (bones) meet together though all these structures but it is need not be present

at each *Marma* and in this juncture where *Prana* (component of life or vital energy) resides or flows through by its *swabhava* (generally) as well as *vishesa* (specifically) and any injury to it leads to *Prananasa* (death/sever pain). [7,8] This explains *Marmas* as important connection centres or crossroads.

The detail description of *Marma* regarding their types, location, structure and

path physiological changes has been found in Ayurvedic literatures. About 107 *Marmas* in total located in trunk and extremities of the body and based on the organs or structure involved. [9-10] These are named as *Mamsa Marma*, *Sira Marma*, *Snayu Marma*, *Asthi Marma* and *Sandhi Marma* and numbered as below. [9,11]

**Table 1: Name & Number of Marmas according to Structural (Rachananusar) Classification**

Mamsa Marma (Total 11)					
Sl.No	Name of the Marma	Number of Marma	Sl.No	Name of the Marma	Number of Marma
1	Tala Hridaya	4	3	Guda	1
2	Indravasti	4	4	Stanarohita	2
Sira Marma (Total 41)					
1	Nila Manyu	4	9	Apasthamha	2
2	Matrika	8	10	Hridaya	1
3	Sringataka	4	11	Nabhi	1
4	Apanga	2	12	Parswa Sandhi	2
5	Sthapani	1	13	Brihati	2
6	Phana	2	14	Lohitaksha	4
7	Stanamula	2	15	Urvi	4
8	Apalapa	2			
Snayu Marma (Total 27)					
1	Ani	4	6	Vasti	1
2	Vitapa	2	7	Kshipra	4
3	Kashadhara	2	8	Amsa	2
4	Kurcha	4	9	Vidhura	2
5	Kurcha Sira	4	10	Utkshapa	2
Asthi Marma (Total 8)					
1	Katika Taruna	2	3	Amsa Phalaka	2
2	Nitamba	2	4	Sankha	2
Sandhi Marma (Total 20)					
1	Janu	2	6	Manibandha	2
2	Kurpura	2	7	Kukundara	2
3	Simanta	5	8	Avarta	2
4	Adhipati	1	9	Krikatika	2
5	Gulpha	2			

## 1. Martial art

*These arts* are codified systems and traditions of combat practiced for a number of reasons such as self-defence, military and law enforcement applications, physical, mental and spiritual development. The ancient martial art of India can be traced back to epic literature. The sage *Maharishi Parsurama* was legendary founder of land Kerala (state) has established 42 deities in this land which have emerged from the sea. In order to look after and protect the 42 deities and temples, he constructed 21 'Gurukulas' after imparting training in the technique of combat i.e martial art. Later this art of technique is termed as *Kalaripayat* and by this technique the enemies are defeated by pressing or giving

blow on some of the vital points over the body and at the same time the person defend himself by this art. It is being practised now days as a measure of self defence. During the course of training or combat, if there happens any trauma or injury to the person involved these are methods to treat the bad effects of trauma immediately by applying counter strokes or blows over certain particular points in the body and finally the person is brought back to consciousness. This branch of particular science of *Marma* and its treatment developed probably in between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries especially in north Kerala and Malabar. Even today under the guidance and supervision of *Gurukulas*, the *Kalaripayatu* technique is being practiced in traditional. [12]

The treatment of *Marmabhighat* has been always integral part of *Kalaripayat*. The students are allowed to handle the weapons such as sticks, lathis, dragger, sword, shield, spear and knife. Only when they develop an adequate proficiency in body control exercises named as *Maippayat*. The term *Marmabhighat* suggests injuries (an effect of stroke on *Marma* due to incision, stabbing, burning or any external stroke) to *Marma* region in the body.<sup>[13]</sup> It can be mild or severe in nature. In general, *Marmabhighat* is likely to produce subjective manifestation governed by the extent and the nature of injuries to the *Marma*. This science was propagated by the Buddhist monks in other parts of Asia. The technique of *Kalaripayat* is fully described in literature *Marma Darpana*. There are 64 *Marmas* distributed all over body based on the particular school of teaching. According to this literature, *Marma* is classified into three categories. 1. *Kula marma* (offensive) 2. *Abhyas Marma* (holds and tricks) 3. *Kochu Marma* (defensive)<sup>[12,14]</sup>

### **1.1 Kula Marma**

The knowledge of these *Marmas* primarily meant for giving fatal blow to the opponent by studying some of the important vital or vulnerable points in the body and symptoms produced on trauma or injury. Though the treatment or remedial measure are also studied but the knowledge of these *Marma* are essentially meant to produce death or sever complications. Hence these spots are very dangerous. This is deadliest of all other martial art known in the Kerala and is of offensive type.

### **1.2 Abhyasa Marma**

Specific method of holds and tricks are taught and the effects of these holds are less severe. The aim of applying paralysing holds and opponent become inactive without fatal consequence. The knowledge of these *Marmas* was essential to protect these points from the blow of the opponent. If any, case trauma occurs it will be less severe but the severity depends upon the force of the trauma. In these groups the location and the symptoms are the same as

described in *Kula Marma*. The remedial measures are also the same. The only difference is its applied aspect or its use in combat or during training. This requires a trick.

### **1.3 Kochu Marma**

Apart from the vital points of the body, some tricks are applied such as pressing twisting or pinching at some of the points in the body so as to make the part or body of an opponent weak or to immobilise the part of the body so as to escape from opponents grip. There are no fatal consequences involved in this technique. These tricks or method of applying trauma require the knowledge of *Marma*. Thus the study of weak points or vital points for this purpose is called *Kochu Marma*. This is more of a defensive nature.

## **2. Traditional Martial art**

Besides the training of Martial arts in state Kerala of India, there had been many other countries imparting more or less the same training but in some modified form. The history of martial arts and the science are the complex confusing synthesis of fact and fantasy. Many of the important books and classics on the subject matter dealing with the popular traditional art have been either lost or destroyed and made unavailable. It is the rivalry which continued in between the countries, provinces, and religious and even between the individuals led to the development of this martial art. This science has been in practice and closely related with the warfare. The science of martial art though originated from India and went to china, Japan and other countries during the Buddha period through the Budhist Monk. The science got popularity in the countries where Budhism has flourished.<sup>[14]</sup>

Out of many martial arts only few among them were very popular and are being practiced even today in most of the countries for individuals self defence. They are karate, Judo, Kung-fu, Boxing, wrestling, other traditional martial arts and the arts of Kerala *Kalaripayat* etc. Karate, judo and other martial arts are believed to

have developed from the source of great *Kalaripayat*.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **2.1 Judo**

The term Judo has its genesis from the word 'Jin-Jitsu' which is comprised of two wards namely 'Jin' means gentle, liable and virtuous to submit and the word 'Jitsu' convey the sense of art of science. It is the science which requires involvement of psychology, knowledge or anatomy and the skill mostly gathered by practice and not the physical strength of individual. It involves the method of defence and offence in personal encounter without any aid by weapons based on sweeping techniques, throw, immobilize the opponent, or use the lever principle. In Japan the art was being practised as military discipline along with the fencing, archery and the use of spear. Its aim is to incapacitate to opponent for the time being by means of simple tricks and holds. The art dose not gives much more importance to muscular strength. The tricks and holds prescribed in the art requires a constant practiced and the strong self confidence by which the export react almost instinctively in the event of sudden attack.<sup>[16]</sup>

### **2.2 Kung-fu**

This Chinese martial are being practiced in country from old days. Originally this art was being practiced by military people but latter on because of its popularity every country opened a training school of this art. The word *Kung-fu-fu-Shu*, is the full name given to this martial art. It is not a game but highly skilled art which if misused by the untrained, may result fatal and most secret defence technique by which the opponents are made cripple. The word kung-Fu denotes discipline or skill which requires a constant practiced to develop a master discipline. This martial art was taken up as a generalised practiced for all Chinese people of the country particularly as a main part of training for the solders. The king of the martial art, kung-fu namely Bruce lee was being recognised as the strongest and swiftest man in the world till recently.<sup>[17]</sup>

### **2.3 Karate**

The word karate communicates the sense of empty hand or a hand without weapon and the correct term would be karate-do which can be translated as "empty hand way". The art of karate in Japan has more resemblance with Judo meant for self defence and practiced with different parts of the upper limbs (fingers, fist, palm and elbow) but also with legs in form of weapons. The judo one utilises the strength of this opponent to captivate him tricks and holds and diverts the force of his opponent instead of facing the same on his body. On the other hand in karate one has to target his power or strength on certain fixed point of the opponent and strikes there with his hands or feet, precipitating him complications or even death. The kung-fu requires breathing exercise (like Yogic breathing exercise) while karate demands recognition of vulnerable spots (*Marma* in body). In both the martial arts, vulnerable spots or points of the body have been paid more attention for the target. The vulnerable spots mentioned in karate are similar in location with the *Marmas* described in *Ayurveda*. Karate speaks about 34 dangerous spots where a blow can result to fatal or other consequence.<sup>[18]</sup>

### **2.4 Taekwon-do**

This martial art is developed in Korea. The name is composed with words tae - "hit or kick i.e. destruction", kwon - "striking or punch or destroy with the hand" and do - "way or method". So are some self-defence techniques and relies mostly on foot but some effective kicks and punches.<sup>[19]</sup>

### **2.5 Aikido**

The name Aikido is composed of three Japanese words: **ai**, meaning harmony; **ki**, spirit or energy; and **do**, the path, system or way. Aikido is the way of the spirit of harmony. This martial art is a comprehensive system of throwing, joint-locking, striking and pinning techniques, coupled with training in traditional Japanese weapons such as the sword, staff and knife. It is a specific defence art which has no plugs or snaps to the opponent and the movements are a little unusual. Aikido is

different from other martial arts in that practitioners seek to defend themselves without causing injury to their attackers. [20]

### **2.6 Ju-jitsu**

This technique was used by Japanese samurai in fight, held both with arms and without arms. Are specific techniques without weapons, which samurai used them when, they were lost their sword in fight. This martial art is congregation of many techniques of striking on vital points with hand or foot, strangulation or blocking or sprain of joints, etc. It is considered the ancestor of Judo and Aikido. [19]

### **2.7 Hapkido**

This Korean martial art is only for defence purpose. Have some similarities with borrowed taekwondo where kicks and punches, but this style of fighting is a combination of taekwondo and aikido, as one who deviates defend then counter attack with power. [19]

### **2.8 Muay thai**

Originated in Thailand and so called Thai boxing. It is a very tough fighting style that uses hands and feet, sometimes fatal blows to the elbow or fist or knee temples genitals or abdomen. By the early 1900s the sport had too many rules to protect the fighters as the matches quite often ended with the death of the loser. [19]

### **2.9 Kendo**

Kendo is one of traditional Japanese martial art that arose from the samurai or warriors in feudal Japan, fighting with bamboo "Swords". Kendo differs from other combat martial art such as wrestling and Judo. Players complete using bamboo swords to try to strike the protective gear of opponents in set target areas. The protective gear consists of armour which includes a helmet to protect the head, a breastplate for the torso and gauntlets to protect the forearms and wrist. This martial art was originally known as *Ken-ju-Tsu* or swordsmanship, which evolved into today's martial art of kendo. [21]

### **2.10 Systema**

Systema is a pre-Soviet Russian martial art. Systema's name refers to the approach

practitioner's take to the art, the system is a reference to different systems in the body, arms, legs, fists, etc. Systema focuses on strikes, grappling and the use of knives and firearms. It is meant to be practiced by sparring. There are very few traditional *Kata*, or forms, found in Systema. Systema practitioners typically train in their own way, which leads to a highly individualized art. [19]

### **2.11 Capoeira**

Capoeira is a Brazilian art form that combines elements of martial arts, sports, and music. It was created in Brazil mainly by descendants of African slaves with Brazilian native influences, and is very acrobatic. Due to the quick and complex moves, mostly kicks and leg sweeps, strength and agility is required. [19]

### **2.12 Krav Maga**

Krav Maga is a hybrid Israeli martial art developed from boxing, wrestling, and street fighting. In Hebrew, Krav Maga is literally translated as "Hand to hand combat." Krav Maga is very fast and aggressive and used by the Israeli Defence Force. [19]

## **3. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

*Seeravedha* (vein puncturing) and paying attention to *Marma* points during surgical and para surgical procedures were popular during 5000 years old Vedic period and later more elaborated in *Ayurvedic* literatures like *Shusruta Samhita*, *Charak Samhita*, *Astanga Sangrah*, *Sarangadhara Samhita* etc. During that period treatment through *Dhamani*, *Sira* and *Marma* was in its 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 invasion and colonial rules.

In view of the need for on time management for 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 Sharira* an Indian martial art *Kalaripayat* was developed. The knowledge



of *Marma* was circulated by the Buddhist monks to other Asian countries especially China, Korea and Japan. And these countries further developed other traditional martial arts like Judo, Karate, Kung-fu etc. or plays accordingly.

This particular science *Marma* requires well conversion of basic knowledge of surface anatomy of human body to make him capable to hold or strike or blow on particular part or area to captivate or defeat the opponent even without having much strength or power. The knowledge of vulnerable or weak or danger points of the human body are made accounted during the course of training.

The martial art points out many vulnerable areas or spots in the body (*Marmas*) where a slight pressure or trauma could produce death or miseries resembling to death. This was the back ground by which the martial art developed to its outmost peak and being practiced to defeat the enemy without possessing any weapons. The opponents are defeated by striking with the help of own hand or feet in the vulnerable area of the body.

In the course or training of martial art, both physical strength and mental progression of trainee combine and produce a kind of psychosomatic intuition. Physical endurance is also developed by both receiving and administering therapies on the one hand, and by gaining proficiency in martial practices on the other. Trainees are furthermore expected to exhibit determined will-power, self confidence and restraint.

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