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Critical analysis of *Prshta Marma* (vital points in the back)

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *Marma* is a fascinating step and breakthrough in understanding human body from a deeper perspective. *Marmas* are the vital points in human body where *Pranah* flows.^[1] Upon injury it causes severe complications including death and upon careful manipulation results in desired healing effect. In *Atharvaveda*, *Marmas* are described for therapeutic and surgical purposes. In *Dhanurveda*, science of *Marma* is used for military approach and martial arts for protecting the vulnerable vital points of soldiers (including elephants and horses) by developing body armor in war.^[2] *Acharya Susruta* explains all the 107 *Marmas* in human body in detail. In this article with the detailed reference of *Prshta Marmas* (vital points of back), the concept of *Marmas* can be further understood.

Key words: *Marma, Pranah, Prshta, Vital points of back.*

INTRODUCTION

In a human there are 107 vital points/*Sthanas* in the body which are collectively called as *Marmas*. The concept of *Marma* is a fascinating step and breakthrough in understanding human body from a deeper perspective. *Marmas* are the vital points in human body where *Pranah* (life force/vital energy) flows.^[1] *Dalhana* commentator of *Susrutha Samhita* defined *Marma* as a vital point of the body that can cause death when it is hurt or struck. The word *Marma* is derived from root word “*Mr*” with the combination of affix “*Manin*” which denotes different meanings like *Jivasthana* (base of life), *Sandhisthana*

(a joint), *Tatparya* (an intention).^[3] A *Marma* point is a vulnerable or sensitive zone where concentrated *Pranah* inheres. It is the resultant of mutual thresholds between *Panchamahabhutas*, *Tridosha* (*Vata, Pitta, Kapha*), *Triguna* (*Satva, Raja, Tama*) and *Atma* (soul or life force).^[4] Mythologically, in *Mahabharatha* it is known that *Bhima* killed *Duryodhana* by hurting vital point in the thigh, as well as *Arjuna* and *Karna* were only vulnerable to be killed through *Marma* exposure. Lord *Sri Krishna* was assassinated by *Jarasvara* by hitting the arrow to vital point on base of toe. *Acharya Vagbhata* defined as an irregular stimuli or pressure that creates pain to a certain body part is called *Marma*.^[5] *Marmas* are vital points of the body where either *Mamsa, Sira, Snayu, Asthi*, or *Sandhi* are congregated in an anatomical area. The *Pranah* inheres in these locations as a matter of course; therefore, *Marmas* produce particular complications or desired healing based on how they are manipulated.

Prshta Marma are the *Marmas* located in the back which include *Katikataruna, Kukundara, Nitamba, Parshwasandhi, Bruhati, Amsaphalaka* and *Amsa*. *Prshta Marmas* are having relation with the important structures and organs present in the thorax and

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abdomen. *Marmas* when activated or massaged produce desired healing results by stimulating body's biochemistry to release hormones and neurochemicals that enrich the body, mind and consciousness. This deep dimension of *Marma* in Vedic period provides an impetus source of knowledge to the practitioners of spiritual or traditional healing systems.

Classification^[6]

As a whole there are 107 *Marma* points in human body.

Structural Classification

Name	No.
Mamsa Marma	11
Sira Marma	41
Snayu Marma	27
Asthi Marma	8
Sandhi Marma	20

Regional Classification

Region	Number
Sakthi (lower limb)	22 (11 in each - 11x2)
Bahu (upper limb)	22 (11 in each - 11x2)
Udara Uras (abdomen and thorax)	12
Prshta (back of trunk)	14
Griva-Pratyurdhva (neck & head)	37

Based on effect

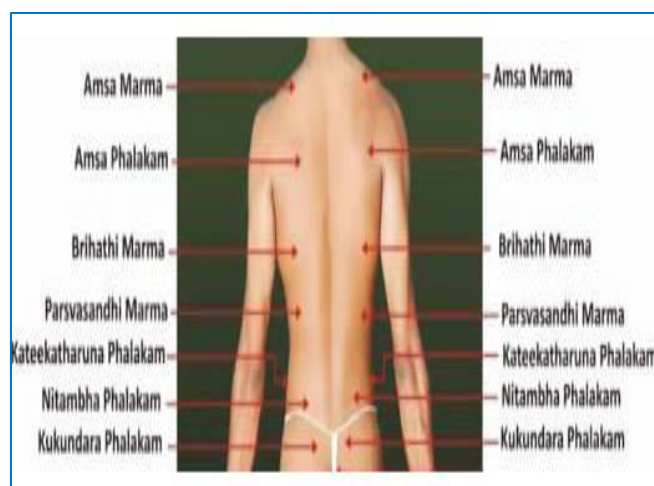
Name	Nature	Number	Predominant Mahabhutha
Sadyopranahara	Injury causes death within 1-7 days	19	Agni
Kalanthara Pranahara	Injury causes death within 14-	33	Agni, Jala

	28 days		
Vishalyaghna	Death upon removal foreign object from injury site	3	Vayu
Vaikalyakara	Injury causes physical deformity	44	Jala
Rujakara	Injury causes severe pain	8	Agni, Vayu

Prshtamarmas^[7]

Prshtamarmas are vital points in the back of the trunk. They are 14 in number (7x2).

Name of Marma	Number	Group of Marma	Class of Marma
Katikataruna	2	Asthi Marma	Kalanthara Pranahara
Nitamba	2	Sandhi Marma	Kalanthara Pranahara
Bhrhati	2	Sira Marma	Kalanthara Pranahara
Amsa	2	Snayu Marma	Vaikalyakara
Kukundara	2	Sandhi Marma	Vaikalyakara
Parsvasandhi	2	Sira Marma	Kalanthara Pranahara
Amsaphalaka	2	Asthi Marma	Vaikalyakara



1. Katikataruna Marma

There are two vital points for *Katikataruna*, which are located on either side of *Prsthavamsa* (vertebral column) facing at the level of *Sronikanda* (iliac crest). Injury to such points causes death being affected by *Sonitaksaya* (blood lose), *Pandu* (anaemia), *Vivarna* (lack of lusture / cyanosis) and *Hinarupa* (disfiguration).^[8]

It is located at the level of fourth lumbar vertebrae and occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Asthi Marma* under the class of *Kalantara Pranahara Marmas*. The iliac crest is the point where large amount of red bone marrow is found; thus, bone marrow is extracted from this site for bone marrow transplantation. It is also most ideal donor site for bone grafting. Damage or injury to this point disturbs in hematopoiesis to produce blood cells and lymphocytes that support the body immune system.^[9]

2. Kukundara Marma

There are two *Kukundara Marmas* located at both sides *Parsva* (lateral sides of back; or flank), i.e., the outer sides of the *Jaghana* (gluteal region), and at the either sides of the *Prsthavamsa* (vertebral column). Injury to these points causes *Sparsajnana-Upaghata* or a loss of feeling of touch (sensory loss) and *Ceṣṭa-Upaghata* (loss of muscle function). The *Kukundara-Marma* occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Sandhi-Marma* under the class of *Vaikalyakara-Marmas*.^[10]

It is the point where the sciatic nerve passes from the lumbar plexus and sacral plexus (L4-S3) and runs through the buttock and to the lower limb. Injury to this point results in loss of function as its articular and muscular branches are disturbed. Loss of sensation (including loss of muscle bulk or fasciculation) may present as the sciatic nerve innervates the skin on the posterior aspect of the thigh and gluteal regions, as well as the lateral aspect of lower leg.^[11]

3. Nitamba Marma

There are two vital points, namely *Nitamba*, located at the both sides of *Parśva* (lateral sides of back; or the flank) and just above the *Śronikānda* (iliac crest)

that enshroud and link the structures of the greater pelvis with the superolateral margin or flank. Injury to these points results in death due to *Sosa* (wasting) and *Dourbalya* (weakness) of lower limbs. The *Nitamba-Marma* occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Sandhi-Marma* and *Kalāntara-Prānahara-Marmas*.^[12]

The hip bone is the fusion of three bones of the pelvis and acts to retain balance of the body and to support the weight of the body in both static (standing) and dynamic (walking or running) postures. Thus, atrophy and muscular debility is common when the point is injured.

4. Pārśvasandhi Marma

There are two vital points, namely *Parsvasandhi*, situated at the lower end of the *Pārśva* (flank), in between the pelvis and flank, and facing obliquely above the pelvis. Injury to these points brings about fatal conditions due to accumulation of blood caused by internal haemorrhage in the abdomen.^[13] The *Pārśvasandhi Marma* occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Sira-Marma* under the class of *Kalāntara-Pranahara-Marmas*.

This point is located at the aortic bifurcation, at the level of the fourth lumbar vertebrae, where the abdominal aorta branches into the left common iliac artery and right common iliac artery. Just below this site, at the level of the fifth lumbar vertebrae, the left common iliac vein and right common iliac vein (each formed by the external iliac veins and internal iliac veins) come together to form the inferior vena cava. Internal hemorrhage in the pelvis may lead to hemorrhagic shock (a condition of reduced tissue perfusion) leading to inadequate delivery of oxygen and nutrients and to death.^[14]

5. Brhatī-Marma

There are two vital point namely *Brhatī*, located at the either sides of the *Prsthavamśha* (spinal column), at the level of the *Stanamula* (base of the breast); injury to which results in death as a complication of *Sonita-Atipravrtti* (severe bleeding).^[15] The *Brhati-Marma* occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Sirā-Marma* under *Kalāntara-Pranahara-Marmas*.

In the right side, the vital point is located just behind the diaphragm (at a level of 10th thoracic vertebrae and in between the 7th and 8th rib), below which the liver rests. The liver is connected to two large blood vessels i.e., the hepatic artery and the portal vein. In the left side, the spleen lies behind this vital point in between the 9th and 11th ribs, where lies the splenic vein branch of the superior mesenteric vein that forms the hepatic portal vein. Therefore, severe hemorrhage in these vital points occurs when they are injured.^[16]

6. Amsaphalaka Marma

On the either sides of the *Prshtavamsa* (spinal column) and near the articulating place of the shoulders and neck on the back, there are two vital points called *Amsaphalaka*. Injury to these points triggers loss of sensation and disability to move arms, as well as dystrophy or progressive muscular wasting of the upper limbs with limited range of movement.^[17] The *Amsaphalaka-Marma* occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Asthi-Marma* under the class of *Vaikalyakara-Marmas*.

This point is located above the spine of the scapula, at the level of the first thoracic vertebrae. The brachial plexus is originated from the neck and passes through the cervico-axillary canal for cutaneous and muscular innervations of the upper limb (the axilla and arm); thus, its injury causes loss of sensation, peripheral neuropathy) and dystrophy. Loss of shoulder (glenohumeral joint) movement and stabilization occurs when the rotator cuff muscles (the scapulohumeral muscles and tendons) are injured.^[18]

7. Amsa-Marma

The vital point, namely *Amsa*, is located in between the upper end of *Bahu* (arm) and *Griva* (neck) of the either sides, where the scapulae is bound together to form the shoulder joint. Injury or damage to the point causes *Stabdha-Bahuta* (stiffness; loss/ reduced range of motion of arm).^[19] The *Amsa Marma* occupies a dimension of 1cm and grouped as *Snayu-Marma* under the class of *Vaikalyakara-Marmas*.

This point is supposed to be located within the area of the rotator cuff (comprising of four muscles and their

tendons) that stabilize the scapulohumeral joint of the shoulder.

CONCLUSION

Symptoms of *Marma* injury vary based on the type and nature of the injured site and its associated *Marma*. The *Amsaphalaka Marma* and *Kukundara Marma* can be understood as vital points where major nerve to the respective limb runs underneath them i.e., brachial plexus and sacral plexus respectively. However, *Amsaphalaka* is *Asthi Marma* and *Kukundara* is *Sandhi Marma* owing to the anatomical structures associated with them. But both are *Vaikalyakara Marmas* due to their ability to impair the normal function of corresponding limb once injured. The *Parsvasandhi* and *Brhati Marma* are *Sira Marmas* due to their underlying presence of major blood vessels and veins. Hence, their injury causes hemorrhage and leads to death (*Kalanthara Pranahara*). Since *Marma* are *Pranah Sthana*, many ailments can be treated by manipulating *Marma* points, such as oil massage (*Abhyanga*, *Pizhichil*), *Pinda Sweda*, *Udwarthana* (powder massage) acupressure, acupuncture, *Yoga Asanas* and *Mantras*. For a physician/surgeon knowledge of *Marma* is essential for better understanding and treatment of an injured site because of the deeper insight one gets in experiencing the true functioning of a human being. Hence the concept of *Marma* is a curse and a boon to humanity due to its destruction effect and healing effect on human body and mind.

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