

The Significance of Marma Points in ENT disorders: A critical review

1. Abhilasha Bhardwaj

2. Rajiv Ranjan Mishra

Designation: Assistant Professor¹, P.G. Scholar²

Department of Rachna Sharir, FIMS, SGT University, Budhera, Gurugram, Harayana¹,

Department of Shalakya Tantra, Govt. Ayurvedic College, Patna, Bihar, India²

E-mail ID: abhilashabhardwaj50@gmail.com¹, rajiv.mishra1995@gmail.com²

Abstract

Background:

Marma points are vital anatomical and energetic locations in the body described in Ayurvedic literature, especially in the Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya. These 107 vital points serve as junctions of muscles, veins, ligaments, bones, and joints, and are considered highly sensitive and influential in maintaining physiological and psychological balance. In the context of ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) disorders, specific *marma* points located in the head and neck region play a crucial role in diagnosis and therapeutic intervention, particularly in conditions like *Karna roga* (Ear disorders), *Nasa roga* (Nasal disorders), and *Mukha roga* (Throat disorders).

Methods:

A narrative review of classical Ayurvedic texts was conducted, focusing on *marma* points related to the *Shira* (head) and *Greeva* (neck) regions. In addition, modern clinical observations and comparative anatomy were considered to correlate *marma* locations with contemporary ENT anatomical landmarks. Traditional therapeutic practices such as *marma chikitsa*, *nasya karma*, and *karnapoorana* were analyzed for their effectiveness in ENT ailments, supported by case reports and observational studies where available.

Results:

Several *marma* points such as *Sthapani*, *Phana*, *Shankha*, *Aavarta*, and *Vidura* were found to have a direct influence on ENT functions. Stimulation of these *marmas* through massage, herbal oils, or external therapies resulted in symptomatic relief in cases of sinusitis, hearing loss, tinnitus, rhinitis, and facial palsy. Integration of *marma* therapy with standard Ayurvedic ENT treatments demonstrated enhanced outcomes in terms of pain reduction, improved hearing, and nasal clearance.

Conclusion:

Marma points offer a significant therapeutic potential in the management of ENT disorders through Ayurvedic principles. Their precise stimulation can restore the balance of doshas, improve local circulation, and support the body's natural healing mechanisms. Further interdisciplinary research integrating *marma* science with otolaryngology may open new avenues in complementary ENT care and enhance holistic treatment approaches.

Key words: Marma, ENT, Karna roga, Nasa roga, Mukha roga, Review

Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life and healing, emphasizes a holistic approach to health, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Within this intricate system lies the concept of *Marma*, which refers to vital anatomical and physiological points in the body. These points are described as the seats of life energy (*Prana*) and are junctions where muscles, veins, ligaments, bones, and joints intersect. According to the *Sushruta Samhita*, there are 107 primary *marma* points (excluding the 108th, considered the mind or *manas*), each playing a critical role in maintaining health or potentially causing severe damage if injured. Among these, several *marma* points are located in the head and neck region, directly influencing the Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) systems.¹

In Ayurvedic literature, disorders of the ENT region are classified under *Urdhwajatru Vikara* (diseases above the clavicle), which include conditions like *Karna Roga* (ear diseases), *Nasa Roga* (nasal disorders), and *Mukha Roga* (oral and throat conditions). The treatment of these disorders not only involves internal medications and *Panchakarma* therapies but also includes external interventions such as *Marma Chikitsa*, which refers to the therapeutic manipulation of *marma* points. These points are not just physical structures but energetic centers that serve as access gateways to regulate *doshas*, especially *Vata*, which predominantly governs the nervous system and sensory functions.²

From a clinical standpoint, specific *marma* points have been found to correlate anatomically and functionally with key structures in modern ENT. For instance, the *Sthapani Marma*,³ located between the eyebrows (glabella), is associated with the frontal sinuses and has been traditionally used in managing frontal sinusitis, headaches, and nasal congestion. Similarly, *Phana Marma*,⁴ located at the sides of the nose near the nostrils, is utilized in *nasya karma* (nasal therapy) to relieve nasal blockages, allergic rhinitis, and sinus infections. The *Shankha Marma*,⁵ situated at the temples, aligns with the temporal arteries and sinuses and is clinically relevant in the management of ear pain, temporal headaches, and tinnitus.

A particularly important *marma* point for ENT is *Vidura Marma*,⁶ located behind the ear, in the depression just posterior to the mastoid process. This *marma* corresponds to the vestibulocochlear nerve and external auditory canal, making it significant in the treatment of hearing loss, ear infections, and vertigo. Another *marma*, *Aavarta*,⁷ located above the

eyebrows, is connected to eye and sinus health and is stimulated to treat eye strain, sinusitis, and migraine-type headaches.

In clinical practice, *marma* therapy involves gentle stimulation or massage of these points using medicated oils, finger pressure, or specific herbal lepas (pastes). These techniques are believed to activate dormant energy, improve circulation, and facilitate the removal of blockages that contribute to ENT pathologies. For instance, application of *Ksheerabala taila* or *Anu taila* over *Vidura Marma*, followed by mild pressure, has shown improvement in symptoms of tinnitus and sensorineural hearing loss.⁸

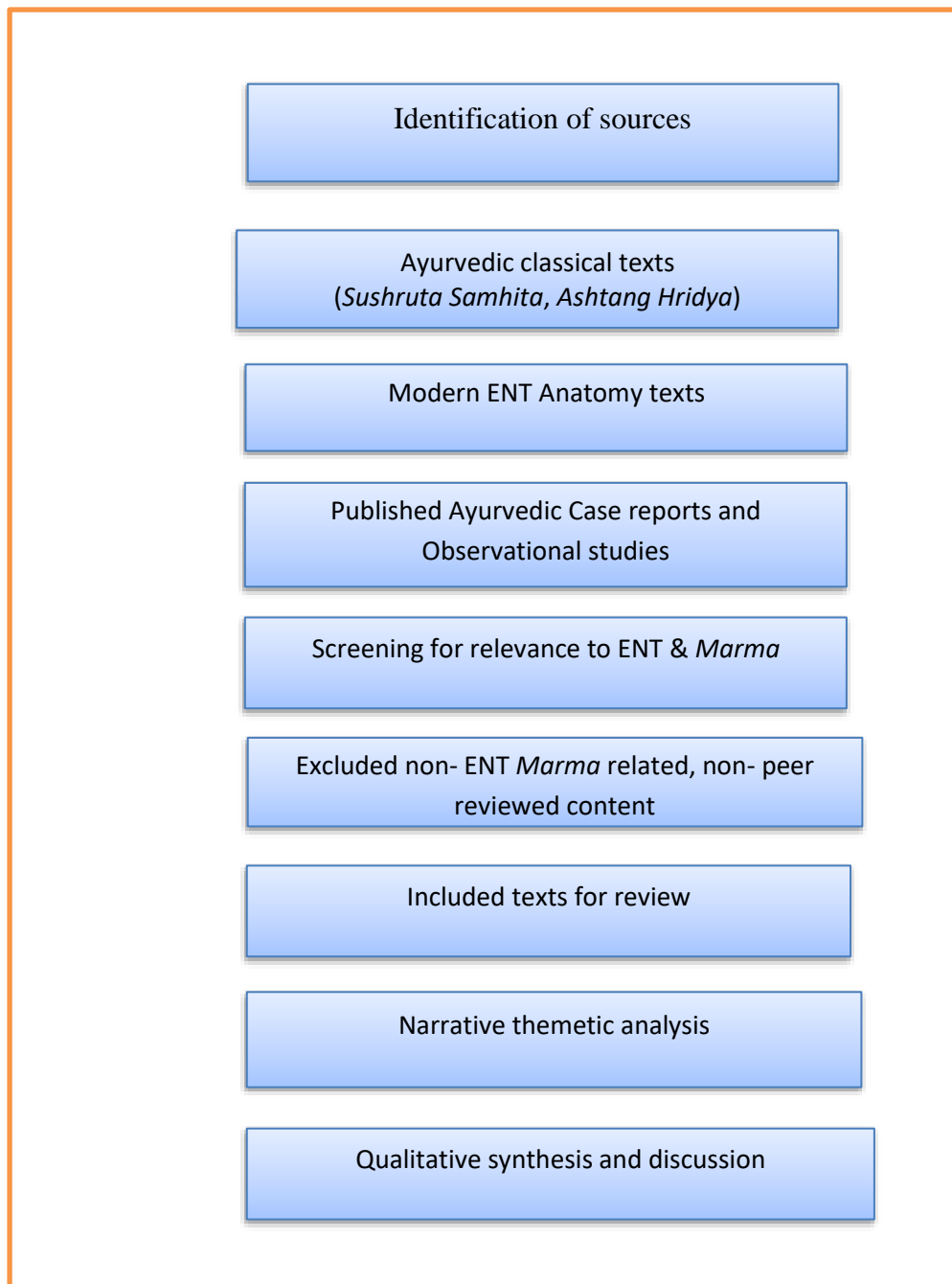
Additionally, *Nasya* therapy,⁹ which is the instillation of medicated oil through the nasal passage, often incorporates stimulation of *Phana marma* points to enhance drug absorption and facilitate drainage of nasal sinuses. Acharya Sushrut and Acharya Vagbhatt also highlighted the role of *nasya* which stimulates *Shringatak marma* and nourishes the ear, nose and throat through communicating channels.^{10,11} This combined therapy is especially effective in conditions such as chronic rhinosinusitis, nasal polyps, and headache disorders. Similarly, *Karna Purana*, the practice of pouring warm medicated oil into the ears, is often done in coordination with *Vidura Marma* stimulation to enhance the therapeutic effects.¹²

In summary, *marma* points provide a unique anatomical and energetic interface that can be effectively used in the diagnosis and treatment of ENT disorders. Their role is not merely theoretical but clinically significant, as evidenced by their correlation with modern anatomical landmarks and their integration into therapeutic protocols. As interest in integrative medicine grows, exploring the role of *marma* therapy in ENT care opens new dimensions in holistic healing. Further clinical research and standardized protocols will help validate and optimize their application in contemporary practice, reinforcing the timeless wisdom of Ayurveda.¹³

Methodology

This article adopts a **narrative review approach**¹⁴ to explore the relevance of *marma* points in the management of ENT disorders from an Ayurvedic perspective. The review is conducted through a comprehensive analysis of classical Ayurvedic texts, contemporary Ayurvedic literature, and modern anatomical and clinical references.

Classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Charaka Samhita* were critically reviewed to extract references related to *marma* points, particularly those located in the head and neck region (*Urdhvajatru*). Commentaries and translations by renowned scholars were used to better understand the *marma* locations and their therapeutic implications. Modern anatomical correlations were established by comparing *marma* locations with standard human anatomy from ENT textbooks and anatomical atlases. Clinical practices involving *marma* therapy in ENT conditions were sourced from published Ayurvedic case studies, observational reports, and Ayurvedic treatment manuals.¹⁵



Flowchart 1 explaining Methodology

References to *marma* points in relation to ENT structures, clinical mentions of ENT disorders (*Karna Roga*, *Nasa Roga*, *Mukha Roga*), articles discussing *marma chikitsa*, *nasya*, *karna purana*, and related interventions and modern clinical observations linking Ayurvedic therapies to ENT conditions are included in the study. Exclusion Criteria included *Marma* points unrelated to the ENT region, articles focusing exclusively on surgical or pharmacological interventions without *marma* involvement and non-peer-reviewed sources lacking academic or clinical validation. The collected data was thematically categorized and analyzed based on the anatomical correlation of *marma* points with ENT structures, clinical

application of specific *marma* points in treating ENT disorders and outcome reports, if available, from Ayurvedic therapy sessions involving *marma* stimulation.

The narrative review format allowed for a qualitative synthesis of knowledge from traditional Ayurvedic sources and its alignment with current clinical understanding in the field of otorhinolaryngology.

Discussion

The Ayurvedic system of medicine is built upon fundamental principles that integrate body, mind, and spirit. Among these principles, the concept of *marma* holds a central position in understanding the interconnectivity between anatomical structures and vital life forces. *Marma* points are not merely physical locations on the body; they are regarded as crucial junctures of *prana* (vital energy), and any trauma or therapeutic manipulation at these points can have significant physiological and psychological impacts. Their role becomes especially relevant in the management of disorders affecting the *Urdhvajatru* region, which includes the ears, nose, and throat (ENT).¹⁶

From the Ayurvedic viewpoint, ENT disorders arise due to the imbalance of the three doshas – *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. *Vata*, being responsible for sensory and neural activities, plays a dominant role in ENT functions. *Marma* points in the head and neck region act as centers where *prana* and *Vata* converge. When stimulated appropriately, these *marma* points help restore doshic equilibrium, reduce congestion, improve circulation, and enhance neurological communication. This makes *marma* therapy a valuable adjunct to Ayurvedic treatments in ENT diseases. The integration of *marma* therapy with modern ENT practice is an area of emerging interest. There are ongoing discussions about combining Ayurvedic therapies with physiotherapy and neuromodulation techniques. For example, auriculotherapy, an alternative medicine based on ear acupuncture, shows parallels with *Vidura marma* therapy. Both involve stimulation of nerve-rich zones around the ear to treat auditory and vestibular disorders.¹⁷

Marma therapy is based on the understanding that life activities are maintained through the flow of *prana*. Disruptions in this flow due to *doshic* vitiation, trauma, or obstructions can be corrected by applying pressure, heat, oils, or herbs to *marma* points. For ENT disorders, several *marmas* play a therapeutic role. The *Sthapani marma* (located between the eyebrows) is connected with the frontal sinus and brain function. It is frequently stimulated during *nasya* therapy and is known to relieve sinusitis, headaches, and mental stress. This *marma* is anatomically associated with the supraorbital nerve and frontal sinus, thereby showing a correlation with modern neurology and sinus management.¹⁸

Phana marma, located near the nasal openings, is activated during *nasya* and external nasal massage. It helps in clearing nasal passages, reducing inflammation, and relieving conditions like allergic rhinitis and nasal polyps. In modern anatomy, these correspond to the lateral

nasal branches of the infraorbital nerve and the arterial plexus of the nasal vestibule. Their stimulation improves blood flow and mucociliary clearance, aiding sinus drainage.¹⁹

Shankha marma is another crucial point, situated at the temples. This region is commonly associated with the middle meningeal artery and the temporal branch of the facial nerve. Its stimulation is beneficial in relieving temporal headaches, migraine, eye strain, and sometimes even vertigo. Clinically, patients with tinnitus or stress-related auditory symptoms report relief when this *marma* is treated with gentle massage using medicated oils.^{20,21}

A particularly significant *marma* in ENT disorders is the *Vidura marma*, located just posterior to the ear, in the depression behind the mastoid process. In modern anatomical terms, this region is closely associated with the external auditory canal, mastoid air cells, and the vestibulocochlear nerve. *Vidura marma* is activated during *Karna Purana* (instillation of medicated oil in the ear) and is believed to enhance auditory perception, reduce earaches, and improve balance. Several clinical observations in Ayurvedic practice have demonstrated that *Vidura marma* therapy, in conjunction with herbal formulations like *Bilva taila* or *Kshara taila*, helps manage sensorineural hearing loss, tinnitus, and otitis media.²²

Avarta marma, located above the eyebrows, is beneficial in eye and forehead conditions but also impacts the sinuses and surrounding cranial nerves. Its stimulation enhances circulation in the supraorbital region, which aids in managing frontal sinusitis and eye congestion, often associated with upper respiratory infections.⁷

Clinical applications of *marma* therapy in ENT conditions have been observed in integrative Ayurvedic settings. These findings suggest that *Marma* therapy can be a valuable complementary approach in ENT care. Practitioners report significant symptomatic relief in patients with sinusitis, rhinitis, otitis, and even pharyngitis when *marma* therapy is administered as part of a comprehensive treatment protocol. These protocols typically include *nasya* (nasal oil therapy), *karna purana*, *dhoomapana* (medicated smoke inhalation), and external applications of herbal lepas.²³

From the clinical research perspective, while large-scale randomized controlled trials are lacking, several observational studies, case reports, and practice-based evidence highlight the benefits of *marma* therapy. There are various case studies which supports the effectiveness of *marma* therapy. For instance, a clinical audit of 30 patients with tinnitus showed mild to moderate symptom relief after *Vidura marma* therapy combined with *Karna Purana*. A study conducted on *Marma* therapy for **migraine** showed significant improvement in pain intensity and frequency after *Shankha Marma* stimulation. Another study shows patients with **chronic sinusitis** experienced reduced nasal blockage and improved breathing after Utkshepa Marma therapy.²⁴

Modern ENT treatments focus on medications, surgeries, and physiotherapy. However, *Marma* therapy offers a non-invasive, complementary approach. *Marma* therapy can be integrated with modern ENT treatments to enhance recovery and symptom relief. Some of the

conditions are compared with modern treatments reflects the advantage of *marma* therapy because of its non-interventional approach. Condition like Sinusitis treated with antibiotics and nasal sprays can be managed with *Shankha & Utkshepa Marma* stimulation. Similarly Tinnitus and Vocal Cord disorders treated with hearing aids and speech therapy, surgery medication respectively can be managed with *Apanga Marma* massage and *Nila & Manyamula Marma* therapy.^{25,26}

Another important aspect is the diagnostic use of *marma* points. Sensitivity, swelling, or discoloration at specific *marma* sites may indicate underlying pathology. In ENT disorders, localized pain at *Vidura*, *Shankha*, or *Phana marma* often correlates with underlying otological or nasal inflammation. This diagnostic approach supports early identification and targeted therapy.²⁷

From a therapeutic standpoint, *marma* therapy is safe, non-invasive, and cost-effective. It requires minimal equipment, and when combined with medicated oils like *Anu taila*, *Ksheerabala taila*, or *Dashmoola taila*, the outcomes are enhanced. Furthermore, it aligns with the principles of holistic medicine, as it not only treats physical symptoms but also calms the nervous system and balances mental functions, addressing the psychosomatic dimension of ENT disorders.²⁸

However, challenges remain. Standardization of *marma* therapy protocols, practitioner training, and evidence-based documentation are necessary for wider acceptance in mainstream medicine. Most *marma* points are described using anatomical landmarks from classical texts, which require modern interpretation for consistency and reproducibility in clinical practice. Additionally, there is a need for interdisciplinary research that includes anatomists, ENT specialists, and Ayurvedic practitioners to better understand the physiological mechanisms underlying *marma* stimulation.

Despite these limitations, the potential of *marma* therapy in ENT care is promising. Its incorporation into routine Ayurvedic practice enhances therapeutic outcomes and aligns with patient preferences for non-invasive, natural healing methods. In chronic ENT disorders, where long-term medication may lead to side effects or resistance, *marma* therapy offers a viable complementary option.

In conclusion, the discussion above underscores the clinical relevance of *marma* points in managing ENT disorders. By integrating classical Ayurvedic knowledge with contemporary anatomical and clinical insights, *marma* therapy emerges as a powerful tool for both treatment and diagnosis. With further research, standardization, and interdisciplinary collaboration, *marma*-based interventions can be refined and potentially integrated into holistic ENT care protocols, offering a unique blend of traditional wisdom and modern science.

Conclusion

Marma therapy, rooted in the classical Ayurvedic tradition, offers a nuanced and effective approach to the management of ENT disorders. By targeting specific *marma* points like *Sthapani*, *Phana*, *Vidura*, and *Shankha*, practitioners can influence vital physiological pathways linked to the ears, nose, and throat. These interventions support *doshic* balance, enhance *pranic* flow, and align well with modern anatomical understanding. Despite current limitations in empirical evidence and standardization, clinical observations and integrative practices point to its immense potential. With focused research and interdisciplinary collaboration, *marma* therapy can emerge as a complementary modality in mainstream ENT care, bridging ancient wisdom with modern medicine.

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