DIFFERENT KINDS OF ATHARVAVEDIC OCCULT PRACTICES

Study of the Atharva-veda indicates that the hymns are generally directed (except a few which are either philosophical (1) or laudatory (2) or descriptive (3) either to individual or community benefit (without causing harm to others) or to cause injury to inimical persons or rivals. Judging by the purpose, the AV hymns therefore can be broadly classified into two groups: holy (beneficent) and black (maleficent).

A closer study will reveal that the former group covers within its range, a large variety of incantations, e.g.
(a) Paustika hymns *, for growth and welfare (4), (b) Ayusya

* Pauṣṭirdhana-janādīnā vṛddhirityabhidhīyate; taddhetubhutam yat karma Pauṣṭikām tadihcocyte (Smṛtidurgabhanjana)
Bācaspatyam Vrhatśamskṛṭabhidhānam

(1) AV. VIII.9, 10; X.7; XIX.53, 54.
(2) AV.XI.4,5; XIX.42
(3) AV. XV. 1-16
(4) AV. I.15; II.17,26; III.5,15,24
hymns that is hymns desiring long life\(^{(5)}\), (c) hymns for healing and curing of diseases\(^{(6)}\), (d) hymns relating to prevention of evil spirits, inauspicious omens, demons and sorcery\(^{(7)}\), (e) hymns for family happiness\(^{(8)}\), (f) hymns relating to women i.e. (Strī-Karma) for example to avert the evils of barrenness & abortion and to ensure successful childbirth\(^{(9)}\), and hymns for victory in disputes, battles\(^{(10)}\) etc., and counteracting and defeating enemies.

We do not find any exact synonym for holy or black occultism\(^2\). In the RV & AV (as shown in the 1st Chapter) however, we come across the word abhicāra (derivative meaning of which is to act wrongly against someone) used in the sense

\(^{(5)}\) AV.i.35; ii.13; iii.31; v.30; vii.53.
\(^{(6)}\) AV.i.1, 22, 25; ii. 8, 33; iii.7; v.4; vi.20;vi.95,109; vii.116.
\(^{(7)}\) AV.i.16, 18, 27, 28; ii.4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18; iv.10, '18; vi. 27-29
\(^{(8)}\) AV.i.118, 30; vi. 64, 78.
\(^{(9)}\) AV.v.25; vi.11, 17, 81; vii.19; viii.6
\(^{(10)}\) AV.i.27; iv.38; v.20, 21; vi.125, 126; vii.12, 50; viii.8
of maleficent occult practices. Later on, Sāyāna also
describes under the heading abhicārakarma, certain practices
which are maleficent in character. The term abhicāra therefore
is the nearest synonym of black occultism.

Black occult hymns contain mantras for causing harm to
others e.g. to kill the enemy, to forcibly win over certain
person or persons, to cause barrenness, loss of wealth &
children etc. to inimical persons.

From the point of view of ritualistic methodology, Sir
James Frazer classified occult practices into two:
(a) Sympathetic occult practices based on similarity and
(b) Contagious based on contact.

(11) Maranam vyasana caiva bandhanam ca viśeṣatah I
Pranipatōntattā vā daivopahātreṇa ca II
Putrādidhanāsaśca grhe dosān bahūnapi I
Etāni sarvāni kānicītvā teśām madhye yatā śatrubhavanti
tathoddeśena yat karma tadabhicārakarma.

Sāyānabhāṣya of AV. xvi.1

(12) AV. ii.19-23; iii.1, 2, 6, 18; iv.16; v.8;
vi.6, 103, 104, 134, 135; vii.34, 35, 113.

(13) AV. ii.30; iii.25; vi. 8, 9, 102, 130-132, 139;vii.38.

(14) AV. vi.138 (to make a man impotent);
vii.50 (for other's less of wealth)

Bases of Sympathetic occultism are that like produces like i.e. representative symbol (e.g. effigy or shadow) of the person on whom rituals are to take effect is made, and the symbol is subjected to injury with the belief that exactly the same thing will happen to the actual person.

The principles of thought of contagious occultism is: things which have once been in contact with each other will continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. Both kinds of occult practices are found in the AV.

**Sympathetic Occultism**

Sāyana (16) and Kausīka Grhya Sūtra (17) apply the AV hymns vi.129 - 131 in the matter of winning over a wicked wife by performing a sympathetic occult rite: an effigy of the wicked wife is prepared and its heart is pierced by arrow. The entire idea and

(16) Tathā tatraiva karmanī āvakehāntim stripratikritim krtvā sūtroquetprakāreṇa dhanurīṣum ca kṛtvā anena, śūktatrayena pratikritim hṛdaye vidhyet.

Sāyanaḥāṣya, the introduction of AV vi.129.

(17) Rathajitāḥ iti māsāṇī nivapati tāraḥṣṭiṣādātā phon pratidēḥ abhyasyatayavrēcyā āvakehāhā.

Kauś. 36, 13, 14.
belief behind such rites is that as the effigy simulates the person concerned, the effects on the effigy will sympathetically act on the actual person, exactly in the same manner.

Numerous other examples of sympathetic occult practices can be found in the Kausika-Grhya Sūtra which gives detailed descriptions of the Atharva-vedic rites, e.g. in the performance of the māraṇa rite to kill a man, an effigy of the enemy is made of earth and hit on the head (18) or his shadow (19) with the belief that the person concerned will similarly suffer.

**Contagious Occultism**

The AV. hymn i.29.1 (20) for wearing amulets and its applications in the Kausika-Grhya-Sūtra (21) are obvious illustrations of contagious occult performances. Such rites are performed with the belief that the amulet will have effect on the person, it is in direct contact with.

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(19) Chāyāṁ vā. Upanihayate. Kaus. vi.47. 55-56

(20) Abhvartena maninā yenendro abhivārvdhe I
    Tenāsman brahmaṇaspatebhi rastrāya vārdhaya II etc.

(21) Abhvartena iti rathaneśmimānīṁ ayahasā-loharajatāṃravestitaṁ hemanābhim vāsiṇaṁ vadhāṇaṁ sūtroktam barhisi krtva sampatavāntam pratrycma, abhvartottamābhhyāṁ acitaṁ. Kaus. 16, 29.
There are various other examples of contagious occult practices in the Atharva-veda (22).

Some occult hymns, applications of which are not found

There are however certain occult hymns, application of which are not mentioned by Kausika or Vaitana. But Sayana (in a period much later than Kausika or Vaitana) however in absence of the source-materials says that their applications are not explicit and have to be determined from linga (inference) i.e. laingiko viniyogah (23).

(22) AV. v.28 (with an amulet of three metals for safety)
    x.3 (with an amulet of varana)
    xix.46 (with and to an amulet called astrta)
    etc.

(23) AV.xix.51 Ayutoham iti Yajurmantratmakam sūktam
    asya viniyogah lingātavagantavyah.
    Śāyānabhāṣya (AV.xix.51)

AV.xix.56. Yamasya lokāt iti sūktasya duhsvapnanāśa
    karmanī laingikaviniyogo vagantavyah.
    Śāyānabhāṣya (AV.xix.56)

AV.xix.57. Duhsvapnanāsakarmanī parisistād viniyogo
    vagantavyah.
    Śāyānabhāṣya (AV.xix.57)

AV.xix. 65, 66, 67 - Suryopasthāne laingiko viniyogah.
    Śāyānabhāṣya (AV.xix.65)
Non-occult hymns of the AV.

Besides these, there are several other mantras in the AV which are not occult in spirit. e.g.
(a) Philosophical mantras
(b) Mantras eulogising some one
(c) Funeral hymns
(d) Mantras which are simple prayers extolling something

These mantras are not occult in character because in these, we do not find the tendency of asking worldly favours by coercing the supernatural spirits. Probably because they are of non-occult character, we do not find any mention of their application in Vaitāna or Kauśika-sūtra.

(23) AV.viii.10 (extolling Virāj); xi.4 (relating to Prāna); xix.42 (relating to Brahman); xix.53-54 (Praise of Kāla)

(24) AV. xi.5 (extolling the Vedic student); xv.1-18 (extolling the Vrātya)

(25) AV. xvii.1-2

(26) AV. xi.3 (extolling the rice); xi.7 (extolling the remnant off the offering)
Thus we see that the AV comprises both occult and non-occult hymns. The occult hymns, however form the larger part and these can be classified either according to purpose (i.e. holy and black) or according to methodology (i.e. Sympathetic or Contagious).