

## Amulet Therapy Described in the Atharvaveda Samhita

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**Abstract:** *In the Atharvaveda Samhita Vedic sacrifices, Vedic incantations, offering oblations, the use of various medicinal plants, minerals and animal substances as well as the use of amulets are discussed in detail for the treatment of various diseases. These amulets were made from different types of plants and herbs. After making the amulets from different types of trees and plants, it was customary to make holes in the middle and tie them with hemp or other threads. As external medications, some amulets were worn around the neck, or affixed to the wrists or armpits. To destroy all kinds of diseases, to obtain long life, to destroy various types of disease-causing krimis and germs, to destroy the hostile practice (abhyacara) of the enemies, to obtain physical strength and radiance, to destroy the enemy, to win over the enemy army in the war, to get rid of all kinds of poisons, to get wealth, to get longevity, to enjoy a healthy body till old age, to get rid of all kinds of sins and to end all kinds of miseries these amulets were worn. The strong belief of common people and physicians in these amulets is reflected in the Atharvaveda Samhita. Amulets played a very effective role in curing diseases in those times. Even many Vedic Gods gained physical strength, won battles and destroyed the Asuras with the help of these amulets.*

**Keywords:** Amulet, Disease, Medicine, Treatment, Atharvaveda Samhita, Health Practice

An amulet, also called *mani* (gems), is an object which is manmade, believed to be endowed with special powers to protect or bring good fortune. The Vedic age witnessed a sharp interest in the medical applications of amulet or *mani*. In the Atharvaveda Samhita Vedic sacrifices, Vedic incantations, offering oblations, use of various medicinal plants, minerals and animal substances as well as the use of amulets are discussed in detail for the treatment of various diseases. In the later Vedic period, amulets were used

for protection and good luck for thousands of years. People would often use amulets to ward off evil spirits, and disease-causing *krimis* and protect in dangerous situations. In many incurable diseases, there was a practice of tying amulets to the patient's body. This amulet treatment was based on nature. Various amulets have been shown to cure disease and ward off danger. The belief that sunlight reflected in amulets penetrates the human body and rids the body of disease was prevalent at that time. Many physicians were adept at curing this disease through amulet treatment. These amulets were made from different types of trees and herbs. Traditionally, these amulets were worn on the arm or hung around the neck. After making the amulets from various types of trees and herbs, it was customary to make holes in the middle and tie them with hemp or other threads. Different types of amulets are known in the Vedas and the benefits of having them in the body are discussed in this episode. Even in the present age, the practice of this Vedic tradition can be observed very well. In our country, the practice of tying or binding on an amulet on the hand or neck for protection is still prevalent. The history of the origin of this practice is also traced in Vedic literature. From Atharvaveda Samhita, the names, functions and properties of various amulets prevalent in that era are discussed here-

*Anjana*- Amulets made from the *anjana* plant were called *anjana mani*. It was one of the important herbs in the Vedic period. This herb was known by two names- it is called *Traikakuda* as it originates in the Trikakudh mountain (i.e. because of its origin in the three-peaked Trikakudh mountain itself) and *Yamuna* as it originates from the Yamuna.<sup>1</sup> This amulet was used to destroy the serious disease called *harima* (jaundice) in the body, to remove the painful diseases that are causing the separation of the limbs, to destroy *rakshasa* and *yatudhani krimis*, to destroy various proliferative *apacit* (pustule or sore) below the knees (*visalpaka*), to remove all kinds of decaying diseases (*yaksma*), to remove eye diseases etc. This amulet was also used to remove the sorrow caused by nightmares.

*Astrita* amulet- *Astrita* means that which cannot be transgressed by anyone. No information is known about which tree or medicinal plants it was made from. The description of this amulet is known from Shatapatha Brahmana<sup>2</sup> and Taittiriya Brahmana.<sup>3</sup> Benefits: it was used to bring prosperity, longevity, ability to destroy enemies and to destroy *yatudhani krimis*.<sup>4</sup> In this amulet, Indra has established the ability to see the enemy and the power of life. So the person who bears this amulet will be able to be saved in every way- this belief was prevalent in those times.<sup>5</sup>

*Darbha* amulet- Men who wanted victory and strength mainly wore this amulet. To gain long life, to gain excessive splendour, to calm the mind and heart of the enemy, to destroy the heart and strength of the enemy, to destroy the enemy from all sides, to break the heart of the enemy and to destroy their physical and external strength, in one word to destroy enemies

completely, this amulet was tied to the body. At that time, it was believed that thousands of different energies existed in this amulet. This amulet was used as a damager of rivals and burner (*tapana*) of the heart of the hater. A hymn of the Atharvaveda Samhita states that in each gland of this amulet, there is immeasurable corrosion and death-preventing armour (panoply) capable of protecting the wearer from envious enemies.<sup>6</sup> Another feature of this amulet was that it also had thousands of potentials for avoiding suffering. This amulet was known as the armour of the Gods i.e. shield of protection as various Gods used to tie it for their protection. It is said to be *Brahmanaspati* i.e. lord of Vedas for the protection of Veda-learners.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is also said to be the armour of Lord Indra. This amulet was worn to strengthen and protect the body. The Atharvaveda Samhita gives several details about the plant from which this amulet was made- with thousand-fold worth, with thousands of leaves and stems, hundred-jointed, unbroken by anyone, rich in milk, the best of all medicines, i.e. very virile.<sup>8</sup> The priest-physician used to tie this amulet to the person who was afraid of death to get longevity. Emissaries of death i.e. *Rakshasa krimis* and *Pishacha krimis* could not harm the wearer of this amulet. This amulet was also tied so that sin could never touch it. Just as *Rajasuya* sacrifice is the best of all sacrifices, *darbha* amulet is said to be the best of all amulets in a Vedic hymn.<sup>9</sup> This divine amulet also played an effective role in imparting long life. This amulet has been specialized under various adjectives- possessed of highly sharpened energy, the best of all medicines and amulets, especially tolerant i.e. enemy slayer, demon slayer, seer of the world, an intolerable force and protector of the latter.<sup>10</sup> From this description, the idea about the importance of this amulet is easily understood.

*Dashaorksha* amulet- The bark of ten different trees like palasha, udumbara, kampilā etc. was collected and surrounded with *lakṣa* to prepare the amulet.<sup>11</sup> The names of the ten tree barks used in this amulet are not available, only a few are mentioned. This amulet was prepared for the treatment of rheumatism. It was able to release the patient whose demonic rheumatic seizure had caught up in every joint of the body. This amulet is known to be used to treat people who were afflicted with *brahma rakshasi* (krimis). It was also used to get rid of planetary disorders.<sup>12</sup> Maharishi Atharva invented this amulet binding and he was a great physician in those days who used this amulet binding to cure planetary disorders. Scholars, Brahmins and physicians living in the society were fully aware of the power of this amulet. Apart from the Atharvaveda Samhita, no description of this amulet is found in any of the Samhitas and Brahmanical texts.

*Hiranyamani*- Nothing is known about the medicinal plant from which this amulet was made. But *Hiranyamani* refers to helpful, useful or profitable gem- that much is clear. This amulet was held for defeating enemies, wishing for one's well-being, attaining the power of achievement, exploring self-power, gaining eternal power and attaining eternal life. This amulet was also

used to gain life, splendour, strength and length of life for a hundred autumns.<sup>13</sup> *Rakshasa*, *pishacha* and other disease-causing *krimis* could not harm the one who wore this amulet.

*Jangida* amulet– *Jangida* is the name of a plant which is no longer found. Vedic literature mentions that this plant is found in forests. The name of one of the special medicinal herbs of *Jangida* and from this medicinal amulet was made. It was customary to make a hole in the middle of this amulet and tie it with a thread or yarn. Apart from this, a description of the consumption of this herb is also available. However, it is called *Jangida* because it is the destroyer of immoral actions. This amulet was very heroic because of the power given by Indra. Indra is said to have placed energy or force in this amulet.<sup>14</sup> This amulet is particularly effective against enemies, diseases etc. This talisman was worn to remove poverty or ill-will, to destroy psychological pollution produced by others, to prolong life, to ward off all fears, to destroy rheumatism called *viskandha*, to destroy the rheumatic disease called *samskandha*, to slay the demons of the element of fear, to destroy the all violent disease *asarikam* and especially the violent *visarikam* which breakdown the body system, to eliminate energy-depleting diseases called *balasa* (cough), to destroy diseases like *visvasaradam* (malarial fever spread worldwide during autumn) by torture and to remove rheumatic pains, back pains, consumption and cancer.<sup>15</sup> This amulet was also used to destroy various types of *krimis* such as *bhuta*, *preta*, *pishacha*, *asura* etc.<sup>16</sup> Vedic literature provides several information about the characteristics of this amulet. It is known that the mystic sage Angira and other sages gave this talisman to protective persons after making it extremely powerful by chanting the name of lord Indra. That is why in the Vedic era, during the tying of amulets, the name of Indra was remembered and *jangida* amulet was worn. Moreover, at the beginning of creation, Indra and the other Gods prescribed the amulet *jangida* as a medicine for the great disease called *viskandha*. Hence, this *jangida* amulet was used as an herbal remedy for *viskandha* disease.<sup>17</sup> This amulet was worn to protect everyone from all directions, to get rid of worms and germs in space, to get rid of poisons in grasses etc. and to ward off possible dangers from various directions. Apart from these, this amulet was regularly used to cure the following diseases- for gaining longevity, to increase sperm power, to block the speed of *rakshasa* *krimis* and avoid their attacks, to destroy *atrina krimis*, to destroy diseases called *jambha*, *vishara* and *abhisochana* (diseases which weaken, lacerate, waste away and breakdown the vitality and resistance of the body), to destroy the hostile practice (*abhyacara*) of the enemies, sapless artificial noise (artificial sound in the ear), disease killer of *sapta visrasah* (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and a mouth), *amivah* and *prstyamaya*.<sup>18</sup> In one word it can be said that it was considered as a panacea for health against all diseases.

*Khadirasvattha* amulet– *Khadirasvattha* amulet, made of a mixture of pipal and khadira trees, was kept in the arm to get rid of the enemies and to

destroy the enemies.<sup>19</sup>

*Parna amulet*– *Parnamani*, literally a jewel-crystal of leaves, has been explained as preparation of *palasha* and other leaves, as the highest giver of vigour and life. This amulet was worn on the body to get wealth and physically to get radiance, strength, longevity etc. The reasons for which this amulet was used were to liberate one's kingdom, to bring another kingdom under one's power, to gain strength during war, to not be dependent on any other power, for longevity of hundred years, to protect the body form in good health etc. This amulet was also worn on the arm for superiority and to be radiant like the Sun. It is known that Indra and other Gods placed this secret amulet on a plant called *palasha* for its auspicious fruitfulness.<sup>20</sup> It was considered to be the best among the perennial medicinal plants.

*Phalamani*– This amulet was made of *khadira* tree. *Prajapati* built this amulet and it was worn by Indra, Soma, Savitah and Apah. A verse in the Atharvaveda contains several laudatory remarks about this amulet and some information about its efficacy- by this amulet, Indra gained strength and *Brhaspati* brilliancy, by this amulet moon was enabled to gain fame, by this amulet *Vayu* became swift. By this amulet *Savita* was able to conquer heaven, this amulet made *Asvins* the protector of sages, this amulet is said to have imparted nectar to water.<sup>21</sup> This amulet was worn to destroy enemies, to destroy various kinds of demonic germs and to bring welfare to people. This amulet was also worn for an increase in the number of people and cattle, Vedic sacrifices and food grains. In short, this amulet protected the wearer in the form of a shield (armour).

*Pratisara amulet*– This amulet was made from the *tilaka* tree. The history of the origin of this amulet is that *Prajapati Kashyapa* created this amulet and sent it for the benefit of all. Then lord of all Gods Indra wore this amulet to get his kingdom and kill *Vritrasura*.<sup>22</sup> Fearless Indra wore this amulet for humanity and thereby won the battles of humanity against inhuman challenges. That is, it is seen how much the Gods also depended on this amulet for the destruction of enemies and victory in war. It was under the influence of this amulet that Indra was victorious and destroyed the *Asuras*, the evil and dark forces of the world and thus became the ruler of heaven and the earth and was able to subjugate and conquer the four directions of space- such is the idea from the Vedic hymns.<sup>23</sup> All the reasons why this amulet was popular in those times were: to repel enemies, to destroy enemies in battle, to display one's courage and bravery in battle, to beget beautiful and valiant sons, to defeat the envious and the haters, to cure various diseases, to subdue the enemies, to win over the enemy army in battle, to kill the *rakshasa* krimis, to prevent the *apsaras* and *gandharvas* from striking, to protect people and wealth etc., to enjoy a life span of hundreds of years i.e. to gain longevity and to enjoy a healthy body till old age. This amulet was considered an all-round protector and defender of the good and a symbol of peace, prosperity and all-round well-being. Originally, this

amulet was worn on the arm. It is also known that the wearer of this amulet could become invincible (i.e. capable of defeating others) like tigers and lions.<sup>24</sup> That is, the person binding this amulet could always be impregnable in battle. After binding this amulet to one's arm, one prays to Lord Indra to bestow the desired happiness on this amulet. Other deities were also prayed to be present in this amulet to strengthen this amulet and make this amulet auspicious.<sup>25</sup>

*Satavara* amulet– The existence of this medicinal plant is observed even in the present era. *Satavara* i.e. hundred-rooted creeper which was widely used medicinally. It is not only because of its hundreds of roots that it has this name; this name of this herb is also due to its hundreds of disease-preventive properties. That *satavara* medicinal amulet is mentioned in Vedic literature. Vedic literature gives detailed information about the benefits of using this amulet- to destroy incurable *yaksmas*, to destroy hundreds of types of *yaksmas*, to destroy hundreds of types of skin diseases called 'ill-named' (such as leprosy, shingles, herpes, ringworm, scabies etc.), to destroy *durnama* and *yatudhani krimis*, to produce hundreds of sons, to destroy all skin diseases, to exterminate *rakshasa krimis* (so that they cannot re-emerge), to destroy hundreds of *gandharvas* and *apsarasas krimis* and a hundred of the doglike ones, to destroy all kinds of noxious *krimis* that circulate in the sky, and to destroy diseases called *apasmara* or epilepsy this amulet was used.<sup>26</sup> This medicine was so potent that this herb could expel demonic worms and germs from the sky with its tip, the lower part or the root was capable of eliminating nocturnal worms (*yatudhani krimis*) and the middle part i.e. the stem played an effective role in destroying all types of *yaksuma* diseases.<sup>27</sup> That is why no germs and *krimis* could attack this amulet, which prevents all kinds of diseases, and no sinner could cross it. This gem was worn as an amulet on the human arm. Then it is understood that this amulet was capable of destroying the above diseases and various types of *krimis* and germs that cause diseases by its majesty or working capacity.

*Shankhamani* (conch shell amulet) - Vedic verses refer to many places of origin for the conch shell. Sometimes it is said that it is produced in the sky by the air, also on the surface of the celestial sphere;<sup>28</sup> sometimes the sea is mentioned as its place of origin.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere in this hymn, it is said that it originated from the nectar moon (*Soma*).<sup>30</sup> It is known that it first arose from the air and was reborn in the sea. Amulets made of conch shells were used for subjugation and removal of various physical ailments and ignorance, for gaining longevity, for destruction of digestive ailments, weakness of mind and memory and all other life-consuming weakness of health, for destruction of enemies, for protection from all kinds of sins, for destruction of *rakshasa* and *pishacha krimis*, for protection from disease-demon and demonic nuisance etc. As a result of binding it to the body, the *krimis* called *sadanvaas* would be destroyed.<sup>31</sup> The priest-physician used to tie this amulet on the arm of the patient to gain longevity, lustre, splendour and strength

and prayed that it would protect him by giving him a hundred years of life.<sup>32</sup>

*Tilaka amulet*– This amulet also produced from the *tilaka* tree was called *tilaka mani*. It was worn to destroy evil deeds committed by enemies and evil attempts by enemies. This amulet was worn on the body to suppress enemies of lesser or equal strength. That is, this amulet was used as an enemy destroyer. This amulet had immense power. The Vedic Gods wore this amulet in the form of a shield. This amulet-shaped armour protects and strengthens the body, gives longevity, destroys enemies and begets the intended results.<sup>33</sup>

*Udumbara*– *Udumbara* amulet was made from the wood of the *udumbara* tree. It was considered the best of all amulets. This amulet was tied to the wish for the nourishment of cattle, sons, wealth health etc. By wearing this amulet, growth is created all over the body, cattle are nourished, the human body is nourished, the house is filled with all kinds of grains, it is beneficial to destroy enemies, and all kinds of desires are fulfilled i.e. one can get desired material, one can get wealth; this amulet gives great prosperity to cattle and food grains, prosperity of cattle and domestic animals, wealth of gems, pearls, corals etc. can be obtained- such descriptions are known from Vedic literature. In a word, this amulet was tied to remove loss, poverty, mental disorder, lack of food etc. from human life. In one hymn this amulet is mentioned as the lord of all amulets and fulfiller of all wishes.<sup>34</sup> The bearer of this amulet prayed to be anointed by powers. It is mentioned in one of the hymns of the Vedas that a person ties this amulet in his body for the nourishment of wealth etc.<sup>35</sup> After holding this amulet, the wearer would pray to *Savita* that the nutrients of milk of cows, buffaloes etc. and the nutrients of paddy, barley etc. be provided through the radiance of this amulet. It is known from the *Shatapatha Brahmana* that one can be saved from all sins if one uses this amulet.<sup>36</sup> The *Tandya Brahmana* tells us that *Prajapati* distributed energy among the Gods, hence the origin of *udumbara*.<sup>37</sup>

*Varana* amulet– This amulet was made from a plant called *varana*. The *varana* is a tree, the *Cratova Roxburghii* found throughout India. A clear understanding of the benefits of using this amulet can be gained from a hymn of the Vedas- this amulet is capable of destroying enemies, able to uproot and bringing down all enemies, protector of desired hopes and remover of all miseries. This amulet is as powerful as the god *Indra* which protects against diseases, fear of sins, fear of nightmares, fear of enemies, greed, and sins arising out of criminal activities of parents, brothers and relatives.<sup>38</sup> Also, this amulet was tied for having sons, and servants, for longevity, for protection everywhere, for preventing enemies, to ward off the hostile practice (*abhyacara*) of the enemies, for gaining long life and for obtaining fame and glory like earth, fire, moon, sun etc. This amulet is said to be a divine quality universal herb that has a thousand eyes and can remove all miseries.<sup>39</sup> *Varana* amulet made of this divine forest tree was also

used to destroy *yaksma* that had entered the human body. This amulet was commonly used to ward off the niggard, perdition, sorcery, fear and also a more violent deadly weapon of death.

*Virut* amulet– *Virut* has been explained as an herb which is a physical as well as a mental sanative. This amulet was worn on the body after invoking it with Vedic mantras to ward off sins from demons, curses of Brahmins, wrath of enemies, anger of relatives etc. After wearing this amulet a person prays to this medicine to protect his progeny and wealth.<sup>40</sup>

*Vyaghro* amulet– The Veda mentions *vyaghro* amulet as the protector among herbs. By using it all diseases and *krimis* escape and perish away.<sup>41</sup>

In the later Vedic period, amulets as described above were considered as a medicine of miraculous effects. The idea of *manis* or amulets was accepted by the medical seminaries from the *Atharvan*. The Atharvaveda Samhita describes the amulet as a thing with life,<sup>42</sup> as born of God,<sup>43</sup> as the body of *Agni*,<sup>44</sup> as *sahasraksa*<sup>45</sup> and *vira*.<sup>46</sup> Not only this, amulets are also described as weapons<sup>47</sup> and armour<sup>48</sup> of sages and Gods. It can be assumed that there was some form of ritual for the binding of an amulet, but detailed information about that ritual is not available.

There is a clear indication from the Atharvaveda Samhita that all the amulets discussed above played a great part in both healing and preventing maladies of all sorts. Whether used alone to strive illness or used in tandem with Vedic incantations, medicines, prayers oblations or other forms of healing magic, such amulets played an important role in the health practices of people during the later Vedic period. These amulets used in the Vedic period were called medical amulets because they were made with the hopeful intention of keeping the bearer healthy by warding off harmful forces and spirits. In almost all the ancient civilizations of the world, the practice of using amulets as one of the ways to cure diseases was prevalent. These amulets played a very effective role in preventing diseases and were also capable of curing diseases. That's why the Atharvaveda Samhita considers an amulet as a living force, better than a thousand medicines.<sup>49</sup>

Amulets made of various plant materials are used in present-day society to get rid of diseases and to stay disease-free which is considered as a symbol of protection and good luck. The history of the origin of this traditional practice prevalent in the present age is traced in the Vedic literature.

#### Notes and References (Endnotes)

- 1 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.9.10.
- 2 Shatapatha Brahmana, IV.11.
- 3 Taittiriya Brahmana, I.5.8.3.
- 4 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.46.5-7.
- 5 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.46.4.
- 6 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.28.1.
- 7 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.30.3.

- 8 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.32.1.
- 9 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.33.1.
- 10 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.33.4.
- 11 Atharvaveda Samhita, II.9.1.
- 12 Atharvaveda Samhita, II.9.
- 13 Atharvaveda Samhita, I.35.1.
- 14 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.34.8.
- 15 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.34.10.
- 16 Atharvaveda Samhita, II.4.4.
- 17 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.35.1.
- 18 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.34.3-10.
- 19 Atharvaveda Samhita, III.6.1.
- 20 Atharvaveda Samhita, III.5.4.
- 21 Atharvaveda Samhita, X.6.
- 22 Atharvaveda Samhita, VIII.5.14.
- 23 Atharvaveda Samhita, VIII.5.3.
- 24 Atharvaveda Samhita, VIII.5.12.
- 25 Atharvaveda Samhita, VIII.5.21.
- 26 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.36.1-6.
- 27 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.36.2.
- 28 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.10.1.
- 29 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.10.2.
- 30 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.10.6.
- 31 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.10.3.
- 32 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.10.7.
- 33 Atharvaveda Samhita, II.11.1-4.
- 34 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.31.11.
- 35 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.31.13.
- 36 Shatapatha Brahmana, VII.5.1.22.
- 37 Tandya Brahmana, VI.4.1.
- 38 Atharvaveda Samhita, X.3.
- 39 Atharvaveda Samhita, X.3.3.
- 40 Atharvaveda Samhita, II.7.4.
- 41 Atharvaveda Samhita, VIII.7.14.
- 42 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.7.10., XIX.34.1.
- 43 Atharvaveda Samhita, X.6.31.
- 44 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.43.6.
- 45 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.35.3.
- 46 Atharvaveda Samhita, III.5.8.
- 47 Atharvaveda Samhita, IV.10.2.
- 48 Atharvaveda Samhita, VIII.5.7.
- 49 Atharvaveda Samhita, XIX.34.7.