

The Concept of Law according to Yajnavalkyasmṛti

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The Yajnavalkyasmṛti or the institutes of Yajnavalkya attributed to the illustrious Vedic seer Yajnavalkya comes next to Manusmṛti in importance. Manusmṛti is regarded as the unique authority in Dharmasastras both by the lay and legal literature.¹ The code of Yajnavalkya is modeled after Manusmṛti, but the treatment of the topics in Yajnavalkyasmṛti is much more logical and systematic in comparison with Manusmṛti. In the studied opinion of Dr. Kane, an opinion accepted by many other scholars too, the Yajnavalkyasmṛti was composed more or less in the period between the first century to second century A. D.²

1. The general content of Yajnavalkyasmṛti

The Smṛti begins with the introduction that the sages of that time approach Yajnavalkya in Mithila and request him: “Do thou describe unto us in full, the religious rites of varnas, Ashramas and those of other inferior castes.” (1.1).³ Meditating for a while Yajnavalkya, the lord of Yogins imparted to the ancient philosophers assembled there (Mithila) the dharmas of varnas, Ashramas and others. The content of the work thus falls under the following heads: Achara (Kanda I), Vyavahara (Kanda II), and prayaschitta (Kanda III).

Achara Kanda

It is called the code of conduct. The main topics of the Kanda are the following: fourteen vydhayas, the samskaras from garbhadhana to marriage, upanayana its time and other details, marriage, varna and jati, the householder, the snataka permissible and forbidden food, rules of purification, gifts, sraddhas, worship of Ganapati and planets, kingship and administration.

Vyavahara Kanda

Administration of justice is discussed here: Legal terms and definitions, debt, deposits, witnesses, documents, or deals, partition, boundary dispute, the dispute between cattle owner and herdsman, sale without ownership, invalid gifts, rescission of purchase, breach of contract of service, violation of conventions, non-payment of wages, gambling and prize-fighting, abuse, assault, sahasa, non-delivery of sold chattel partnership, theft, adultery, miscellaneous wrong, etc.

Prayaschitta Kanda

Atonement and penances are important themes of this Kanda: impurity due to death or birth rules of conduct in distress, rules for forest hermits, rules for yati atonements proper and miscellaneous atonements varnas and Ashramas

(2) The hierarchy of varnas

We can safely assume that Yajnavalkya presupposes the divine origin of the world, man and his varnas as expounded in Manu. The Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras are the four varnas of them the first three are twice-born⁴. The superiority of the Brahmins over other varnas is taken for granted in the Smṛti. Next in order are the Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. The fact of their superiority according to Yajnavalkya is attributed to the two births they have - the natural birth and the second birth due to the initiation, which qualifies them to the study of the Vedas (I 39; I.10). They are the only ones entitled to have the Samskaras.

In recounting the hierarchical structure of varnas, the functional division based on jobs seems to have guided Yajnavalkya. Thus he says: “The celebration of sacrifices, study, and the making of gifts are the general duties of the Vaisyas and Kshatriyas; the Brahmanas have, in addition to these, the acceptance of gifts, the performance of religious rites for others and teaching,”⁵ the highest duty of Kshatriya is the protection of the subjects: money lending, agriculture, trade and lending of cattle are sanctioned for the Vaisyas⁶, the service of the twice-born is the duty of the Sudra: if he cannot maintain himself by that, he may become a tradesman: or he may maintain himself with various works, of art, but he should always do good unto the twice-born.⁷ There are ten principles of conduct common to all. There are the following: “Abstention from cruelty, truthfulness, non-stealing, purity, control of the senses, charity, mercy, self-restraint, forgiveness, performing of actions shorn of crookedness and dishonesty, according to the nature of one’s age, wealth, words, dress, learning, family and deeds”.⁸

Yajnavalkya makes this division of society into different varnas for the fulfillment of different tasks in the interest of the welfare of society, As Manu does(I, 31), Yajnavalkya too conceives the theogonic extension of the social order, Yajnavalkya says: The four varnas, Brahmana, Kshatriya Vaisya, and the Sudra, have in order originated from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet of that Purusha....⁹ Accordingly, the Brahmanas, come next to Purusha himself making the social order a hierarchical one headed by them.

Ashrama life

Varna is fixed at birth. Asrama is a natural institution and no one can be compelled to move from one Ashrama into another at any stage of life in which the individual

has to adopt and discipline himself for a specific period. According to Yajnavalkya, the four well-defined asramas which an individual should normally undergo are (i). Brahmacharya Asrama (I.36), (ii). Grihastha Asrama (I. 29), (iii). Vanasprasta Asrama (III.45), (iv) Sanyasa Asrama (III.56)

The youth after his upanayana¹⁰ is called “dvija” and is formally admitted into brahmacharyasrama. The upanayana prepares the boy to be initiated in education and studies, Vedic or otherwise. As for the age at which a boy is to be initiated Yajnavalkya gives no rigid rules. Upanayana may be performed at any convenient age based on family traditions¹¹. A Brahmacarin is to study the three Vedas from a guru for a period of thirty-six, or eighteen, or nine years, or any shorter period, till perfect proficiency is attained therein. On completion of the study of the Vedas,¹² the Brahmacarin becomes eligible to enter the grihasthasrama, with the approval of the guru.¹³

Grihasthasrama is considered the highest Asrama of dignity and honour, because every other Asrama derives some benefit out of it and seeks the support of the householder. Even Grihasthasrama, the Brahmana stands at the top.¹⁴

Regarding marriage, Yajnavalkya describes different forms of marriages such as Brahma, Daiva, Assha, Kaya, Asura, Gandharva, Raksasa, Paisacha¹⁵. Of these, the first six are regarded as lawful for a Brahmana. The last four are licit for Kshatriya. Except for the Raksasa form, the last four types are allowed for a Vaisya and a Sudra. The paisacha and the Asura forms should never be used as they are the most unlawful.¹⁶

The Grihasthasrama is exalted as it facilitates the attainment and observance of all the Purusharthas ie., Kama, Artha, Dharma, and Moksha.¹⁷

The asrama next to Grihasthasrama is vanasprasta. It is said that one enters the vanaprastha ashrama when his skin is wrinkled and his hair turned grey. Then he proceeds to a forest either leaving the wife with his son or accompanied by her.¹⁸ He should continue the Vedic recitation and worship the fire, which he has to carry with him. He should live a life of begging and austerity.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that there is nowhere any mention of a Vaisya becoming a vanaprastha in the smṛti. It is also doubtful whether a Kshatriya ever became a Sanyasin: and a Vaisya perhaps never aspired to become one.²⁰

A Vanasprasta differed from the householder in as much as the former had to love under greater discipline and had to keep “artha” and “Kama” under strict control. He was not to shave and so to become venerable with his beard.²¹ Later on, the “vanaprasthin,” passes into the stage of Sanyasa, leaving both his house and wife and not confining his stay to any place.²² Having experienced the emptiness of

life with its joys and sorrows, he meditates on reality. Thus, he attains atma-jnana(self-knowledge) and preserves his equanimity unaffected. He returns blessings for curses and strives to remain in what is described as Jivan-mukti (liberation of life). On death, he becomes one with God and frees himself from the round of births and deaths.

3. The Status of Women in the Family and Society

The home or family constitutes the bedrock of society, in Yajnavalkyasmṛiti and it is on women that the stability and sanctity of the home and household life to rest. In this spirit Yajnavalkya teaches that women should be protected by every means²³: "Women should always be adored by the husband, brother, father, kinsmen, mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband's younger brother and other relatives with ornaments, clothes and food".²⁵

A woman is expected to be an expert in domestic works, contented, economical in expenditure, respectful to the elders and the husband⁴⁶. Regarding the duty of women of the Smṛiti says that wife should carry out her husband's words because that is the highest duty of a wife⁴⁷. It is said that "virtue, worldly profit, and pleasure" multiply where the husband and wife help each other⁴⁸. Yajnavalkyasmṛiti blesses the women by saying that "the woman who is devoted to the well-being of her husband, is observant of good conduct, and has her sense under restraint, reaps glory in this world and incomparable bliss in the next⁴⁹". He finds the ground of holiness in women in this that "the Moon has conferred on them purity; the Gandhrvas, sweet speech; and Fire, the most exalted state of holiness; therefore, women are most holy⁵⁰". At the same time, he condemns the unchaste woman by calling her "Svairini⁵¹" and confers on her severe punishments.⁵²

4. Ideological Foundations of Yajnavalkyasmṛiti

Yajnavalkyasmṛiti has been acclaimed and accepted as one of the three important Codes and Institutions among the Dharmasastras; It has been assigned a high and honoured place of authority by eminent legal luminaries and the highest courts of law like the Privy Council, England.⁵³ Now our concern is to investigate the ideological foundations of Yajnavalkyasmṛiti. For this purpose, we would like to make an analysis of some of the opening and concluding verses of the Smṛiti. This would help us to have a better understanding of the underlying motives or principles of Yajnavalkya's Law Code and its binding force on the people together with its philosophical background.

(i) Yaj. Sam. I.1

The opening verses of the Smṛiti narrate how the great sages (Munis) approached Yajnavalkya, the great Yogin, and asked him to explain the sacred law. It begins thus: "Having adored Yajnavalkya, the lord of yogins (ascetics) , the Munis

(anchorites) said: Do thou describe unto us in full, the religious rites of varnas (four castes), Asramas (for orders) and those or other inferior castes".⁵⁴

It is a call or request made to the yogin to impart the law. There is no hint here that the Smṛti was written by the order of some king or chief with the purpose of compiling a Digest of Sacred Law.

Yajñavalkya is addressed as the 'Lord of Yogins'. It is an apt address to Yajñavalkya as he speaks of the yogic practices throughout the Smṛti, and sets forth yoga as the 'path to immortality'⁵⁵. There are a number of verses in which Smṛti speaks of yoga: for example, on true yoga, III. 110-112; on the effect of yoga, III. 160; on the acquirement of yogic power, III. 195-205, etc. and Yajñavalkya introduces the purpose of the Code with the expression "see the atman by yoga"⁵⁶. Some scholars suggest that Yajñavalkya has himself written a monumental treatise on yoga which is called Yoga-Yajñavalkya, a Samhita on yoga, which incorporates his instructions to the erudite lady Gargi. And in the Chandogya Upanisad yogic principles are taught by Yajñavalkya to Maitrei.⁵⁷

(ii) Yaj. Sam. I.2.

Mediating for a while, the 'Lord of Yogins', residing in Mithila, said to the Munis: "Know these to be the religious rites of the country where the antelope roams at large"⁵⁸. This verse reveals to us the identity of Yajñavalkya. He was resident of Mithila, an ancient kingdom in India. Yajñavalkya describes here the religious rites beginning from Garbhādanam to Antyesti in the first and third kandas. As we have mentioned already, the Yajñavalkyasmṛti is modelled after Manusmṛti; the rules and regulations described in both the Codes are of the same nature. So we leave here the rubrical part and concentrate more on the philosophical assumptions on which the Smṛti is built up.

On a number of matters, particularly on the question of status of Sudras, of women's right to inherit and hold property, and of criminal penalty, Yajñavalkya is much more liberal in comparison to Manu⁵⁹. It supports the view that Yajñavalkyasmṛti exhibits a more advanced state of thought and feelings than Manusmṛti. The following are the principal points wherein Yajñavalkyasmṛti differs from Manu.

Manu seems to allow a Brahmana to marry a Sudra girl (Manu. III. 13), while Yajñavalkya emphatically opposes it; He states: There is a saying that the twice-born ones can get their wives from among the Sudras; I do not approve of it; for the atman (soul) itself is born there (in the wife) as the son⁶⁰". Manu first describes the practice of niyoga and then severely condemns it (IX. 59.68), while Yajñavalkya does not condemn it⁶¹. Manu enumerates eighteen vyavaharapadas. Yajñavalkya does not expressly enumerate them all in one place, though he

defines vyavaharapada and adds verses of a miscellaneous character (prakirnaka) in his section on vyavahara.⁶²

In the treatment of the civil and criminal law in contrast to Manu's teachings on vyavahara, Yajnavalkyasmṛti contains a much smaller number, though more systematically presented.⁶³

In Yajnavalkyasmṛti the description of the duties of the King, including the administration of justice, civil and criminal law, occupy considerably more than one third of the text. It contains 367 verses on this matter out of the 1009 in the Smṛti.⁶⁴

Yajnavalkyasmṛti nowhere teaches the performance of rites other than those prescribed with Vedic writings. It does nowhere inculcate the exclusive worship of one or other of the deities.⁶⁵

Legal definitions are almost wanting in Manusmṛti, whereas Yajnavalkyasmṛti, they are frequent, especially in the Vyavahara-kanda.⁶⁶

All these show that Yajnavalkya, while invariably availing himself of the method of his predecessors, developed and refined them more and more. As G. Buhler remarks in his introduction to the text >The Laws of Manu= "Yajnavalkyasmṛti and other metrical Smṛti have a touch of perfection because they belong to a much later period when the special law schools had made a considerable progress in the elaboration of their theories⁶⁷"

(iii) Yaj. Sam. I.3.

Yajnavalkya enumerates the following as the sources of religion: "Puranam⁶⁸, Nyaya⁶⁹, Mimamsa⁷⁰, Dharmasastra,⁷¹ Vedanga⁷² (six) and the Vedas⁷³ (four)- these fourteen are the roots of knowledge and religion⁷⁴". He accepts these fourteen Vidyas and asks the Aryans to study these and to put them into practice: the four Vedas; their six Angas or subsidiary sciences: the Dharmasastras; the Mimamsa containing rules of exegesis; the Nyaya or dialectic philosophy; and the Puranas or records of antiquity.

(iv) Yaj. Sam. I.4.

As we have noted already, the Dharma-Sastras of the Hindus are not one single book but consists of the Samhitas or Institutes of various sages. They are twenty according to the list given by Yajnavalkya:- Manu, Atri, Vishnu, Harita, Yajnavalkya, Ushana, Angira, Yama, Apastamba, Samvarta, Katyana, Vrihaspati, Parasara, Vyasa, Sankha, Likhita, Dakṣha, Gautama, Satapata and Vasishta. There are differences of opinion regarding the number of lawgivers. But almost all the scholars of the Smṛtis accept Yajnavalkya second in importance to Manu. In the Yajnavalkyasmṛti, Yajnavalkya includes himself among the promulgators of Dharma along with Manu and others.

(iv) Yaj. Sam. I.7

Yajnavalkya states the following to be the ordained foundations of Dharma: the Smrtis, conduct of pious men, self love, desire begotten of auspicious will⁷⁵. D.F. Mulla commenting on this verse says that "the last part of this text would seem to add one more source of law to those enumerated by Manu" (Manu II. 12). In Manu IV 161, the satisfaction of the inner self is mentioned as one of the indices of Dharma. And the expression 'desire begotten of auspicious will' has no bearing on positive law and must be read as giving reference to Dharma in its ethical sense. The "self-satisfaction" mentioned in this context is not anybody's self-satisfaction, but of those good persons who are learned in the Vedas. But the words "desire begotten of auspicious will" do not incorporate any doctrine of private judgement in law⁷⁶. Here we should make note of the fact that "the desire begotten of auspicious will" is one oriented to others. it implies that all religious norms take their origin in "doing good to others". in this way auspicious will can be regarded as the root of all Dharma.

(vi) Yaj. Sam. I.6

Here Yajnavalkya teaches that dana constitutes the entirety on one's own dharma. "Whatever is given in full faith to a needy person, in accordance with time and place and the means at your disposal, that is the entirety of dharma. If you do this you need not do anything else⁷⁷". Our giving should be based on faith. It should be done according to the need and time. Thus our "dana" should always correspond to the need, time and place of the one who is in need. Thus "giving" is considered to be the supreme virtue in the Smrti so much so that a man of "dana" does not require anything else to be "dharmic".

(vii) Yaj. Sam. I.8

This verse seems to be the centre around which the whole Smrti revolves. It reads as follows: "Sacrifice, good conduct, self-restraint, ahimsa (non-violence) dana (charity), svadhyaya= (study of one's own Veda) constitute the highest dharma. By this means atmadharsanam= is achieved⁷⁸". Thus "atmadharsana" is the goal of Dharma. To achieve the liberation of one's soul from all bondages of ignorance one has to have recourse to sacrifice, good-conduct, self-restraint, ahimsa, dana and svahyaya. These are only means by which one can achieve atmadarsanam. Such practices constitute an organized activity through which the individual acquires the intuitive experience of "atmadarsanam" (self-realization). Self-realization repeatedly presented in the Smrti as the goal of all moral practices and rituals as in Yaj.Sam I. 50; III. 201-205; I. 156-159.

(viii) Yaj. Sam. I.50

A religious student is promised total liberation if he follows the principles and laws in his life. "By such a method to religious student who has controlled his

sense, after renouncing his body, attains to the region of Brahma, he is not born again in this world."⁷⁹

(ix) Yaj. Sam III. 156-159

Yajnavalkya, in the prayschitta kanda, speaks of immortality as the culmination of the individual's liberation. "The service of preceptor, consideration of the meaning of the Vedas and other scriptural works, and the performance of the rites laid down therein, association with the pious, healthy conversation with the good, avoiding sight and touch of women, regarding all creatures as one's own self, renouncing what is accepted, wearing a shattered linen, withholding the senses from their objects, shaking off the lethargy and the perception of sinfulness in mental proclivities, non-attachment to rajas and tamas, purification of the mental faculties, non-attachment, and the control of the senses; purified by all these expedients and ended with satva, one becomes immortal.⁸⁰ So, final emancipation is the goal of all other works.

(x) Yaj. Sam. III. 201-205

A close look at the Smṛti will show that by the verse VI. 201-205, the Smṛti formally comes to an end. Later additions are mere eulogies and the following prescriptions for prayschitta might very well be later interpolations. In the end the goal of all the Dharmasastra literature is set as the attainment of super-human power, leading to immortality and emancipation, "One who has studied a Veda, who has renounced his desire, who lives in a forest, who lives on unsolicited food and who is of restricted diet, acquires the highest super-human power."⁸¹ "....The renouncement of the body, after the consummation of yoga, leads to immortality."⁸² "One. who acquires wealth by fair means, who is given to spiritual knowledge, who receives guests, who performs Sradha, and who speaks the truth, even though a house-holder is emancipated."⁸³

All these verses are, directly or indirectly, resonant of "atmadarsanam" at times replaced by terms like "immortality" and "emancipation." To have "atmadarsanam" (self-realization) one should study the Vedas, practise sacrifice, celibacy, penance, self-control, faith, fasting and control over the senses.⁸⁴ Moreover, the "self" should be enquired into, seen, meditated on and listened to, by the twice-born living in all āśramas or orders.⁸⁵ Thus, we could say that the "knowledge of the soul" (atmajnana) is the highest goal, as that alone brings immortality. It stands as the supreme goal of the Smṛti.

5. Unifying Thought in the Yajnavalkyasmṛti

(i) The Religious and Philosophical Presuppositions of the Yajnavalkyasmṛti

The Smṛti in general and the Yajñavalkya Smṛti in particular, had evolved in the context of the religious culture of the Aryans. The backbone of the social and moral philosophy of Yajñavalkya is the Vedic conception of the Absolute self. (Svayambhu III 335). Yajñavalkya uses varied and colorful similes to draw the picture of the Svayambhu. "As a potter makes an earthen pot by placing an earthen clod on his wheel; as a builder builds a house with twigs, earth and wood; as a goldsmith makes articles of various forms merely with gold as his ingredient; as a silk worm makes a web with its own saliva; so the soul, taking all elements (earth etc) and the instrument of sensation (eye etc.) creates in various orders, bodies, fettered by the fruits of deeds."⁸⁶ The absolute self is the ultimate ground of all beings. From this frame of reference all social and moral legislations in the forms of *achara*, *vyavahara* and *prayschitta* are evolved in the Yajñavalkya Smṛti.

Yajñavalkya Smṛti was composed for the welfare of mankind which is repeatedly expressed in the different sections of the Smṛti. Keeping in mind the hierarchical structure on the society, Yajñavalkya declares that "by following this religious Code, a Brahmana becomes a worthy person; a Kshatriya, virtuous and Vaisya, possessed of wealth and corns."⁸⁷ Welfare of whole world is envisaged in the Smṛti as its aim. "One seeking learning, attains the same; one wishing for wealth gets it; one longing for longevity becomes possessed for the same; and one hankering after prosperity gets the same."⁸⁸ Thus, we find in the Yajñavalkya Smṛti the ultimate purpose of human existence is to achieve the welfare of all mankind in the given historical situation.

(ii) The Rules and Regulations of the Caste System

The rules and regulations in the Smṛtis in general, and in Yajñavalkya Smṛti in particular, are given to particular social divisions and states of life. Thus, this type of organization of the society is taken for granted. So, it treats of the *varṇasrama dharma*s so meticulously as to ensure its stability with all precautions. As Dr. Shivaji Singh says, Yajñavalkya Smṛti was written at a time, "when the society was toiling to save itself from decay and when the need of conservation and stability was uppermost in the mind of social thinkers."⁸⁹ The four divisions of society into four distinct groups and states of life were taken for granted at that period for the smooth running of the society.

(iii) The Theory of Karma

The Smṛti believes in the doctrine of Karma, which is the cornerstone of Hindu religion and philosophy. Man has a long chain of births and deaths (Yaj. III. 131, 132, 182) and assumes a particular body in every birth (Yaj. III. 134, 135, 136, 197) on the basis of his past karma. In every birth he is bound to do a good number of actions since he cannot remain idle even if he chooses to be (Yaj. III. 186-188). Yet, freedom is there in man to regulate his conduct. Thus, Yajñavalkya Smṛti teaches that the fruition of an act depends on the one hand upon human effort and

on the other upon the favourable factors created by a man's own previous actions. The idea of karma also justifies the distinction of varnas.

(iv) The Purusharthas

Yajñavalkyasmṛiti has some explicit teaching about the purusharthas i.e., dharma, artha, kama and moksha. The Smṛti objects to one's pursuit of moksha (liberation) without previously having discharged one's duty to world. In accordance with the natural course of human life, every individual is supposed to adopt successively the four āśramas.⁹⁰

As is the common practice, the first part of one's life brahmacharya is entirely devoted to education; the second, garhastya, to marriage and discharge of one's duty to society and to the pursuit of wealth by exercising some lawful calling or occupation; the third, vanaprastha, to retirement from active life and adoption of a life of a recluse in the forest for the practice of meditation in preparation to entering the fourth Āśrama of sanyasa, by completely resigning from the world. Dr. Kurian Kadankavil explaining the interrelation between āśramas and purusharthas writes: "The earlier stages have no meaning independent of the fourth āśramas and the fourth purushartha. So also, the last cannot be achieved independently of the earlier three stages. There need not arise any conflict between the group life and the spiritual aim of the individual for they cannot but be interdependent."⁹¹ Here too, the primary goal of an individual is "atmadarsana" leading to moksha which is the very foundation stone of the smṛti on which the edifice of the Code of Conduct is erected.

(v) Atmadarsanam-the Keynote of the Smṛti

Here one may ask whether the welfare of mankind alone was the sole purpose of Smṛti? Has the Smṛti got anything beyond mere ethical principles and general welfare of humanity? Our answer has to be positive, as the Smṛti tends towards a goal much beyond mere societal or ethical norms. It, in fact, preaches of a religion beyond ethics. The prime goal of the rules and regulation laid down in it is to help the individuals achieve "atmadarsanam". Thus, we should conclude that the Smṛti was written only with the ulterior intention of leading mankind to a superior goal, the goal in this case being the "atmadarsanam" or self-realization of the individual. To this end it presents yoga as the means.

From the above analysis one may see three basic philosophic-religious principles that work as the inter-linking thoughts of the Smṛti. They are: (i) the truth of an Absolute Being (Svayambhu) from which everything takes its existence; (ii) the total welfare of mankind; and, finally, (iii) "atmadarsanam" or self-realization as the ultimate goal of life ending in liberation or mukti, to be achieved through Yoga.

(vi) The Binding Force and the Liberating Dimensions of the Smṛti

Yajnavalkyasmṛiti is considered an authoritative Law Code in the Orthodox Hindu belief. It is authoritative in the sense that it reproduces the rules underlying in the Vedas themselves⁹². But its importance and influence are much more than this. Its philosophy of "atmadarsanam" as the final purpose of law gives it a liberating dimension. According to it the "seeing of atman (self) by yoga is superior to all these works" (religious practices etc) (Yaj. Sam. 1.8). And it enjoins that "all who live in different asramas or orders of life should enquire into, meditate and listen to the self" (Yaj. III. 191) because, that is the superior goal of one's life. The "Kshetra" (the body) (Yaj. III. 177-178) has thus to get freed from all entanglements by the "Kshetrajna" (the self). Such liberating overtones make the Yajnavalkyasmṛiti much more than, and even superior to, a mere code of Law. It shows a very clear perception of the purpose of law which can be none other than liberation; liberation obviously entails "Kshetrajnanam" and "atmadarsanam"-clear knowledge of the self and atman, God and soul.

Conclusion

Law codes that arose in every culture have their own uniqueness. The Sitz im Leben of every law system is varying. But the ultimate aim of every law is to give freedom to man. Moreover, from history, we learn that law, which should have been a liberating force, has also turned out to be an enslaving reality.

Various aspects of the Hindu vision of life based on Yajnavalkyasmṛiti have been analyzed above. We do not want to establish the superiority of one legal system over the other. It is because the Sitz im Leben of each law system is unique. But they have a common end in view, i.e., to lead man towards freedom.

To a Christian, the call of the law towards its liberating function reaches its culmination and fulfillment in the person Jesus Christ. Paul inspired by the liberating law as developed by the Jesus, taught the early church through his letters that "law was only a tutor to lead us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24) and the letter of the law is replaced by the Spirit of law, namely liberation and love. Thus, Jesus Christ showed himself as the herald of freedom and Paul in his turn theologized the gospel of freedom and was acclaimed the apostle of 'free spirit.'

The thrust of the Yajnavalkyasmṛiti was to liberate man and not to enslave him. Yajnavalkyasmṛiti teaches that seeing atman(self) by yoga is the superior religion to that of all works (religious practices etc.) (Yaj. Sam. I. 8). The kshetra (body) should be freed from all bondages by the Kshetranja (the self) (Yaj. Sam., III. 191). Therefore, atmadarsanam (self-realization) seems to be the ideal goal of a man to which he is prepared by following the rules and regulations as prescribed in the Smṛiti. Thus, Yajnavalkyasmṛiti echoes the call towards liberation of man and not his enslavement. Yajnavalkyasmṛiti visualizes atmadarsanam (self-

realization) as its keynote with the Smṛiti's injunctions, prescriptions, prohibitions, and directives.