

Introduction to Yajnavalkya Smriti

Dr. Pushpalatha S M.¹

Abstract: *Yajnavalkya Smriti is the most important work after Manusmriti. The text is named after the revered Vedic sage Yajnavalkya. The text may have been attributed to him out of respect, as is prevalent in Hindu traditions. Bhagavata says that Yajnavalka is not only a great Yogi, Paramagnani, Dharmatma but also Adhyatmaveshawa. In Puranas, he is said to be an avatar of Brahma. According to Vayu Purana, he was born from the body of Chaturmukha in the first Mahayuga. Vishnu Purana also says that he was the son of a sage named Brahmaratha. It is said that he got knowledge of Vedas from Guru Maharshi Vaishampayana.*

Keywords: *Yajnavalkya, Adhyatmaveshawa, Shuklayajurveda, Vyavaharaadhyaya, Bharatavarsha, smritivakyas, DhrunnAvasthane, Prakirnaprakarana, vastushuddhi, ashaucha, shraddha, stridharma, raja dharma.*

Yajnavalkya Smriti is the most important work after Manusmriti. The text is named after the revered Vedic sage Yajnavalkya. The text may have been attributed to him out of respect, as is prevalent in Hindu traditions. Bhagavata says that Yajnavalka is not only a great Yogi, Paramagnani, Dharmatma but also Adhyatmaveshawa. In Puranas, he is said to be an avatar of Brahma. According to Vayu Purana, he was born from the body of Chaturmukha in the first Mahayuga. Vishnu Purana also says that he was the son of a sage named Brahmaratha. It is said that he got knowledge of Vedas from Guru Maharshi Vaishampayana. The style of Yagnavalkya Smriti is more systematic than Manusmriti. Yagnavalkya Smriti is more popular than any other smriti except manusmriti. No other smritis is so comprehensive as Yajnavalkya. Anusthup metre is also eloquent. All the topics that smriti deals with are arranged in chapters.

¹.Faculty,D.o.s,in Sanskrit, University of Mysore-06.

This work is similar to Manusmriti in many aspects. However, it differs from it in important matters like niyoga, inheritance, gambling etc. It collects the views incorporated in the Brihadaranyakopanisad and the Paraskaragrihyasutras of the Shuklayajurveda of the Vajasaneya branch. Yajnavalkya presents fourteen vidyas: four Vedas, six Vedangas, Purana, Nyaya, Mimamsa and Dharmashastras.

Purana nyayamimamsa dharmashastrangamishritaha |

Vedaha sthanani vidhyanam dharmasya cha chaturdasha || (verse 1.3)

He did not condemn niyoga and gave property inheritance rights to widows. Yajnavalkya did not ban gambling but brought it under state control and made it a part of state revenue. The Vyavaharaadhyaya states rules on the grounds, evidence, debt, etc.

According to the calculations of great scholars, the era of the smritis goes back almost one thousand five hundred years to the present day. In other words, to understand the smritis or the memory-directed life path, its period has to be extended further back, from the Vedic period to the most recent, the middle of the last century.

Many commentaries have been composed on Yajnavalkya Smriti. Among them, the commentaries of Vishvarupa, Vijnaneshwar, Apararka, Shulapani and Mitramishra are famous. It is stated that along with Yajnavalkya Smriti there are three smritis, namely VriddhaYajnavalkya, Yogayajnavalkya and BrihadYajnavalkya. VriddhaYajnavalkya deals with business and propitiatory matters. Yogayajnavalkya has 12 chapters on atonement. It discusses about Yoga. There is an explanation of Hatha Yoga in the chapter. It does not discuss much about theology. The BrihadYajnavalkya has 12 chapters and about 930 verses. This is a book where mantras, gayatri, sandyopasana, bath, tarpana and pranayama are elaborated. It advocates theological issues.

Yajnavalkya was a Hindu Vedic sage. Although the name Yajnavalkya derives from yajna, signifying ritual, Yajnavalkya is described as a thinker, not a ritualise. Yajnavalkya is documented as one of the greatest sages of Bharatavarsha. Adhavaryu, well versed in performing sacrifices, was a guru known primarily for his contribution to the origin of the Yajurvedic Shakas. He is one of those rare seers who transformed from Karmakanda to Brahmajnani in his lifetime. His excellent logic and reasoning of Brahmajnana are revealed in various Samaveda. Dialogues with Janaka Maharaja and Brahmavadinis like Gargi and Maitreyi illustrate this. He is widely mentioned in Upanishads and Puranas. He is the exponent of the "NetiNeti" philosophy, brilliantly described in the Brihadaranyaka

Upanishad. The Yajnavalkya Smriti holds great renown in ancient Smriti literature and is the guiding text for duties and dharma followed in India.

His works are

- 1 - Yajnavalkyasmriti
- 2 – Yajnavalkyagita
- 3 - Yajnavalkya Upanishad
- 4 – Yajnavalkyashiksha
- 5 - Gayatribhasya.

Meaning of Smriti

'Smriti' is a Sanskrit word from the root **Smara** which means memory or remembrance of what is known. From this it can be firmly said that the Smriti granthas are the written memories of the sages who studied the Vedas deeply and learned the precepts they enunciated. Vedas are supernatural. That is, man did not create it. On the contrary, the smritis are canonical texts because they were composed by maharishis who had vast knowledge of the Vedas, meaning that the validity of the smritis is in accordance with the Vedic teachings. Even if no Vedic verses are available as the basis for some of the smritivakyas, they must have been hidden in the kalagarbha.

Smritis are not only scriptures but also filled with many other aspects like worldly business, penal rules, inheritance rules, dispute and family rules. Every detail of man's daily life is covered in Smriti literature. In addition to this, social systems and all its other subsidiary organisations are involved. Duties related to internal and external affairs of the country are also described in it. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is no person, group, society, or human affairs that do not come within the boundaries of smritis. Smritis also illustrate theology, sraddha karmas for the remembrance of the dead, birth and death, propitiation, sacrifices, manners, and customs to be followed in daily life and business.

Ancient Dharma scholars

Veda, vedangas, upavedas, agama, itihasa, purana, smriti and darshana are the pillars of Indian culture. Hindu dharmashastras are very extensive with ancient heritage. The ancient texts open by reverentially mentioning Dharma scholars. The following have written a Dharmasastra (most of these are lost to history).

The main ones are: Manu, Atri, Vishnu, Harita, Yajnavalkya, Ushana, Angira, Yama, Apastamba, Samvarta, Katyayana, Brihaspati, Parasara, Vyasa, Shanka, Likhita, Daksha, Gautama Shatatapa and Vasista.

Manvatri Vishnuharita Yajnavalkya Ushanongira

Yama, aapastambasamvartaha Katyayana Brihaspatihi

Parasara Vyasashankalikhita Daksha Gautamau

Satatapa Vasishtaschadharmashastra prayojakaha || (verses 1.4-5)

Dharmasastra is a genre of Sanskrit theological texts and refers to the treatises (sastras) of early Hinduism on dharma.

In Dharmashastras, we generally find three main themes: Achara, Vyavahara and Prayaschitta. In the Vedas, these elements are laid in the seed form. In the Narada and Parasara Smriti, there is a classical subject division. Each part is divided into cases in the works of later commentators, making the content easier to understand.

Nature of Dharma and their description

The word dharma is formed by the dhatu called Dhruv Avasthane. This dhatu gives the meaning of upholding, supporting and nurturing. In the Vedas and Upanishads, the word dharma is used in many places. Here the word dharma is used in the sense of religious concepts and rites.

Dharmashabda used in Rigveda is demonstrated here;

Tani dharmani prathamanyasan (1.164.43)

Samidyamanah prathamanutdharma (3.17.1)

suvito dharma prathamanutatya (10.56.3)

Many mantras of Rigveda with the word 'Dharman' are found in the Atharvaveda.

Achiityachettava Dharma Yuyopi ma (6. 51.3)

Yajnainayajnamayajanta deva (7.5.1)

Trinipadavichakrame (7.21.5).

In this mantras sense of merit is derived from the performance of dharma. Gautama said; **Yato abhyudayanishreyasa siddhisadharmah vaisheshika sutra.**

It is dharma from which happiness and birth are attained. Manu gives a beautiful meaning to dharma thus – **Vidvadbhih sevitasadbhihi nityamdvesharagibhih | Hridayenabhyanjnatah yodharmah tam nibodhata** || (Manusmriti , 3.2.1)

Whatever the wise and wise observe, who are free from hatred and bitterness, what they wholeheartedly agree to, that is dharma, said Manu.

Ahimsa paramodharmah

Nonviolence is the highest dharma (Mahabharata, Anushasanaparva, 115.1)

Dharmalakshana of Mahabharata can be said to be influential. It is like this.

Dharanaddarmamityahuh DharmodharayatePrajah |**Yatsyaddharanasamyuktam Sa Dharma Iti Nishchayah ||**

It means that whatever dharma is worthy of our observance, it should be universally accepted and beneficial to everyone. This righteousness protects. About 20 Dharmasutras are known, some of which have survived into the modern era as their original fragments. Four Dharmasutras have been translated into English, and most remain in manuscripts, all bearing the names of their authors. However, it is still difficult to determine who the real authors are. The existing Dharmasutras are listed below:

1. ApastambaDharmasutra (450–350 BCE) is a part of Apastamba's larger Kalpasutra. It contains 1,364 sutras.
2. Gautama (600-200 BCE) Although this Dharmasutra comes as an independent text, it may once have formed a part of the Kalpasutra associated with the Samaveda. It is probably the oldest extant religious text and originated in modern-day Maharashtra-Gujarat. It contains 973 sutras.
3. BaudhayanaDharmasutra (500-200 BCE) is a part of the larger Kalpasutra, like the Apastambha of Baudhaya . It contains 1,236 sutras.
4. VasishthaDharmasutra (300-100 BCE) forms an independent text, and some parts of the Kalpasutra, i.e. the Sruta- and Grihya-sutras, are missing. It contains 1,038 sutras.

About Yagnyavalkya Smriti

It consists of 1010 slokas and is divided into three chapters Achara and Moral Code, Vyavahara or Civil Law and Prayaschitta (penance) or Penal Code.

Each Adhyaya contains the following number of shlokas;

The Achara 368 shlokas.

The Vyavahara 307 shlokas.

The Prayaschitta 335 shlokas.

The whole of **Acharya**Adhyaya is divided into 13 prakaranas. The prakaranas are-

- I. Introduction(Upodhgaata) 1—9 slokas, It describes the fourteen vidyas, twenty expositors of religion and the constitution of the parishad.
- II. Brahmachari 10—50 slokas, where the samskaras up to marriage are described.
- III. Marriage(vivaha) 51—89

- IV. Varna-Jati 90—96
- V. Grihastha-Dharma 97—128 Explains the duties of the householder.
- VI. Snataka-Dharma 129—166 The duties of **Snataka**.
- VII. Food (Bhakshyaabhakshya) 167—181 Explains rules about prohibited and permitted foods
- VIII. Purification of things (dravyashuddi) 182—197 Topics related to the purification of various materials are explained
- IX. Dana (charity) 198—216 Donations should be given to the righteous, if it is given to the unworthy, will receive the fruit of tamas. Godana is the greatest among all things.
- X. Sraddha 217—270 Gives a detailed description of shraddhas
- XI. Worship of Ganesha(ganapatikalpa) 271—294 deal with propitiatory ceremonies of Vinayaka and the nine Grahas, respectively.
- XII. Graha-Shanti 295—308 It is explained that one who desires wealth, removal of calamities, rain, immortality, and strength should perform Griha Yajna.
- XIII. Raja-Dharma 309—368 slokas, The king's duties are described.

Acharya means good behaviour and custom. It refers to a community's normative behaviour, practices, conventions, and behaviours that enable society and various individuals to function. Acharya also deals with regulations relating to the performance of religious rites and ceremonies and the general duties of men according to their Varnas and Ashramas. That is Ceremonial Conduct, Personal Life, Home Life and Social Life. Code of conduct to be followed by a human being from birth to death.

Vyavahara means judicial procedure, process, practice, conduct and behaviour. The king, a Dandadhara, is a worthy person to keep the common people under control.

The first verse of the Vyavahara chapter of the Yajnavalkyasmriti is-

**Vyavaharan Nripah Pashyeth Vidwadbhihi Brahmanaihi Saha |
Dharmashastranusarena Krodhalobhavivarjitaha ||**

However, for the decision of justice, there was a council of scholars well-versed in Vedic Dharmashastra, truthful and impartial. There are different opinions on the number of its members. Katyayana says that the king should invite the merchants who are respectable and wealthy to justice. The king could appoint a judge in his absence. In the small village, there was a judge appointed by the king, besides which the councils formed according to the

opinion of the mandals called puga, shreni, kula examined the case. The civil and criminal courts were the same.

Each case had to go through four stages: complaint, written statement, weighing of evidence and conclusion. The party who did not get the oath would get the divine oath. The oath is of two types (Human and Divine).

Vyavaharadhyaya is a source of complete information about the origin and evolution of Indian justice. The practice of justice practised in the civil courts is very similar to the ancient Indian justice system.

The Vyavaharadhyaya, divided into 25 prakaranas, is devoted to discussing eighteen points of dispute (Astadasavyavaharasthanani).

Yajnavalkya has made some alterations in dealing with these 18 topics. The first and second prakaranas deal with general rules and regulations (Sadharanavyavaharamatrkaprakarana) and exceptional regulations (Asadharanavyavaharamatrkaprakarana). The third prakarana is on laws relating to loans. The next five prakaranas are related to deposits, witnesses, written documents, divine tests, and divisions of property and inheritance. Laws relating to disputes about boundaries and disputes between master and servant are discussed in the next two prakaranas. Eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth Prakaranas deal with laws on the sale of articles, gift and their acceptance and returning a thing purchased to a seller, respectively. Laws regarding breach of contract and breach of established usage (Samvidvyatikrama) are dealt with in the next two prakaranas. The forthcoming nine prakaranas deal with topics relating to the payment of wages, betting and gambling, defamation, assault, robbery, non-delivery of articles sold, partnership, theft, adultery and seduction. The last prakarana is Prakirnaprakarana, where certain miscellaneous rules are codified.

The Vyavahara sections of Dharma texts include chapters on the duties of a king, court system, judges and witnesses, judicial process, crimes and penance or punishment. However, the discussions and procedures in different Dharmasutra and Dharmasastra texts diverge significantly. Some Dharmasastra texts, such as those attributed to Brihaspati, are almost entirely Vyavahara-related texts. These were probably composed in the common era, around or after the 5th century of the first millennium.

Documentary evidence as the highest foundation of Legal Procedure: Yajnavalkya portrayed evidence as hierarchical, with attested documents receiving the highest consideration, followed by witnesses, and finally, ordeals (five types of verifiable testimony).

Yajnavalkya distinguished between courts appointed by the king and those formed by communities. He then portrayed these courts as a part of a system of hierarchical appeals.

The **Prayascittadhyaya**, which mainly deals with various rites of atonement, is divided into five prakaranas, namely, Asauca, Apaddharma, Vanaprasthadharma, Yatidharma and Prayascitta.

Regulations about Asauca or impurity are described in the first prakarana. Apaddharmaprakarana deals with procedures not usually proper for a caste but allowable in times of difficulty or calamity. The regulations relating to Vanaprastha, the third stage of life, are described in the third prakarana. The fourth deals with the duties of a Yati or one who has renounced the world. Several kinds of expiatory rites are discussed in the last prakarana called Prayascitta.

Conclusion

Yagnavalkya smriti is an essential work next only to manusmriti. The three main parts of the ritual, business and atonement, are presented in it. It describes dharma, who should celebrate dharma, how to celebrate it, studies, brahmacharya dharma, householder's karma, panchayagnas, charity, bhakshabakhshavivechane, vastushuddhi, ashaucha, shraddha, stridharma, raja dharma, atman, atmanigraha, the idea of salvation, atonement, peace, etc. Smritis present us with an understanding of the nature of society during that time. Dharmashastra literature is an eternal testimony to the real living portrait of Indian culture.

Bibliography

1. Bharatiya Smritigalu, Vidwan Raghusuta Critical Edition of the Mahabharata, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
2. Dharmashastra ka itihasa P.V.Kane,Bhaga-3
3. Dharmashastra mattu Arthashastra, Dr.T.V.Satyanarayana, BhavanaGandhikendra 2002.
4. RigvedaSamhita by HH Wilson 1866
5. Samskruta Bhashashastra mattu Sahityacharitre, Dr.K.Krishnamurthy, Vidwan N. Ranganathasharma, Vidwan H.K.Siddagangaiah
6. Smriti Khandaha, Dr. SriKrishnasomavalaha
7. Veda samskritiya parichaya, Prof.K.S. Narayanacharya, vedavidyapublishana, Dharwad.1983

8. VyaasaMahaBharatam,BharatadarshanaPrakashana,Bengaluru 2002
9. Vyavahara Mayukaha,BhattaNeelakanta,Nirnayasagara.
10. YajnavalkyaSmriti Dr. GangasagarRai, chaukamba Sanskrit pratishthan, 2013
11. YajnavalkyaSmriti SanskritText,TukaramaJavajenam,Nirnayasagaramudrana 1931
12. YajnavalkyaSmriti Text with Commentary Vijnanesvara called the Mitaksara and notes from the gloss of Balambhatta, Translated by Raibahaddur.
13. YajnavalkyaSmriti, A.NageshaRangoKulakarni, samajapustakalayaShivaji road, Dharawad.
14. YajnavalkyaSmriti: Text with Commentary Mitaksara of Vijnanesvara by Dutt .M. Bhaaratiyakalaprakashan 1st January 2011