RESEARCH PAPER

The King and the Corporate Body: Legal Pluralism and State-Society Relations in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti

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Abstract

The Yājñavalkya Smṛti names kulas, śreṇīs, pūgas and gaṇas, and it also tells the king what to do about them. Reading the text with Vijñāneśvara's Mitākṣarā, I ask where that leaves the king: sole lawmaker, or head of a ranked order? My tools are legal pluralism and the state-in-society approach. My evidence is a set of verses from the Ācāra and Vyavahāra sections, read under three heads: recognition, hierarchy and control. The root text treats agreements made by groups as binding alongside royal rules. The Mitākṣarā then fits their operation inside the limits of dharma and royal enforcement. Verse 2.30 ranks the bodies that hear disputes, and the Mitākṣarā takes the ranking to allow recourse from a lower forum to a higher one. Elsewhere the king is made responsible for correcting groups that abandon their own dharma and for punishing collective economic action that injures others. I call this arrangement "nested, state-supervised pluralism": collective norms are recognised, but inside a ranked and supervised order. What I describe is what the texts prescribe. Whether kings and groups behaved this way is a different question. Three difficulties in the commentary also get separate treatment: the sense of *bheda* in 2.192, what *kulāni* refers to in 1.361, and how far 1.343 reaches in preserving local usages in conquered territory.

Keywords: legal pluralism; state-society relations; Yājñavalkya Smṛti; Mitākṣarā; śreṇī; Dharmaśāstra

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1. Introduction

Is the king, in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, the only source of binding norms? Or does he head an order in which other bodies make and apply rules too? Four provisions matter for the answer. Verse 1.343 directs the king to preserve certain established usages in a territory he has taken. Verse 2.186 recognises obligations that arise from agreement or custom next to those that arise from royal command. Verse 2.30 ranks the forums that hear disputes. Verse 1.361 authorises the king to correct groups that depart from their own dharma. Any answer has to keep the root verses apart from the later explanations of Vijñāneśvara in the Mitākṣarā and of Mitramiśra in the Vīramitrodaya (Gharpure, 1936, on 1.343 and 1.361; Rāya, 2015, on 2.30 and 2.186).

The main points are covered in three verses. The importance of the appointment of royal officials, pūgas, śreṇīs and kulas, is highlighted in verse 2.30. Verse 2.186 highlights the existence of dharma based on consensus and the king's dharma. In verse 1.361 the king has the ability to discipline kulas, jātis, śreṇīs, gaṇas and local population who go against their own dharma. These verses highlight three related issues of recognition, hierarchy and oversight. [Note: Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.186; Mitākṣarā 2.186; Raya, 2015]

Two frameworks guide the reading. Griffiths (1986) took aim at legal centralism, the view that law is one system with the state at its centre. Migdal (2001) supplies a different question: when political institutions and social groups deal with each other,

how do they end up shaping and enforcing rules? Both help me ask which bodies the text recognises, how it ranks them, and how far royal supervision reaches. Neither can show how the institutions of a normative Sanskrit text worked in practice.

Earlier work comes at related questions from several sides. Davis (2005, pp. 92–117) studies corporate groups and rulers in medieval India through Dharmaśāstra and inscriptions. Voyce (2007) treats monastic law and pluralism through the Vinaya and Dharmaśāstra. Davis (2012) takes up duties, rights and jurisdictional pluralism. Chattopadhyaya (1997) and Chakravarti (2022) supply the wider history of state and society. Where I differ from these studies is in scope. I take verses on collective agreements, the ranking of forums and royal correction, and read them together to see how the Yājñavalkya Smṛti and the Mitākṣarā connect the king to kulas, śreṇīs, pūgas and gaṇas. At every step what a verse says is kept apart from what the commentary adds.

The paper makes three contributions. It gives a close reading of the king's relation to named collectives in a single Dharmaśāstra text. It examines three problems in the commentary: *bheda* in 2.192, *kulāni* in 1.361, and the reach of 1.343, especially how royal control of a territory sits with the preservation of local usages. And it keeps prescription and practice apart. My argument is that the passages support nested, state-supervised pluralism. That is an interpretation open to testing against the verses, not a description of early Indian legal life as a whole.

The rest of the paper runs as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on corporate bodies and the state, and Section 3 turns to Dharmaśāstra and legal pluralism. Section 4 sets out the framework and Section 5 the text, editions and method. The passages are analysed in Section 6, discussed in Section 7 and drawn together in Section 8.

2. Corporate Bodies and the State in Early India

2.1 Corporate Bodies as Economic and Social Organizations

Collective institutions in early India have been studied for their economic, social, religious and political roles. Majumdar's *Corporate Life in Ancient India* (1922) is still an early and broad survey. Khanna (2006) reads the śreṇī as an organisation with features comparable to guilds, corporations and producers' cooperatives. The comparisons help, but guild or corporation is not the same as śreṇī. Chakravarti (2022) places trade organisations inside wider relations of state and society. This literature makes the case that collective bodies deserve attention. It cannot tell us what *kula*, *śreṇī*, *pūga* or *gaṇa* mean in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti. Only the text and its commentary can do that.

2.2 The State and Autonomous Spaces

Chattopadhyaya (1997) examines "autonomous spaces" in relation to state authority and suggests that local and collective institutions could exercise authority without standing wholly outside the political order. Davis (2005) reaches a similar view for medieval India: collective institutions and rulers are better studied together than as separate spheres. The periods and evidence of these studies differ from my material, however. Inscriptions and historical reconstructions cannot stand in for the normative statements of a Dharmaśāstra. My question is therefore specific: how does the Yājñavalkya Smṛti itself represent the authority of collective bodies and the king's relation to them?

2.3 What This Literature Leaves Open

The literature shows that collective institutions matter and that their relation to political authority needs study. What it leaves open is a close reading of the normative rules on that relation in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti and the Mitākṣarā. The edition I use prints the root verse, a Hindi rendering and the Sanskrit commentary together. I keep these as two layers. The verse is Yājñavalkya's own statement. Definitions, examples and limits come later, from the commentary (Yājñavalkyasmṛti, 2015, Mitākṣarā on 2.30).

3. Dharmaśāstra and Legal Pluralism

3.1 Legal Pluralism and Dharmaśāstra

Griffiths's (1986) target, legal centralism, is the idea that law is unified and centred on the state. Pluralism asks instead how different normative orders live side by side and affect one another. Applied to premodern South Asia, it gives a way of seeing how royal authority, custom, community obligation and learned interpretation were set against each other in the sources. It is a way of asking questions. It does not prove that every group named in a Sanskrit text was an independent legal system.

Davis (2010) warns against reducing Hindu law to state legislation in the modern sense. Textual authority, established practice and community institutions all belonged to it. Textual rules still mattered, but how far they were obeyed has to be investigated and not assumed. The same holds here. The Yājñavalkya Smṛti shows a normative and jurisprudential vision, not uniform practice.

Verse 2.30 lists royal appointees, pūgas, śreṇīs and kulas in a ranked order for dispute resolution; Rāya's 2015 edition provides the text and commentary for it (Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.30; Mitākṣarā on 2.30; Rāya, 2015). Davis (2005, pp. 92–117) offers a wider comparison through legal texts and inscriptions. I do not claim that this ranking has gone unnoticed. What I add is a reading of the verse together with the provisions on collective agreements and royal correction.

3.2 Royal Authority, Custom, and Adjudication

How does royal command stand to other sources of normative authority? This is a central problem in Dharmaśāstra studies. Davis (2010) and Michaels (2010) read Hindu law alongside textual learning, established practice and institutions, and refuse to equate it with legislation. McClish (2019) takes up state law and dharma in ancient India. This work points toward the relation between royal adjudication and the wider tradition.

Recognising custom did not mean accepting every custom. The texts could acknowledge community obligations while placing them within dharma and political authority. So the question is not whether custom or royal power won out. It is how different forms of authority were recognised, ranked, interpreted and limited. That question bears directly on the Yājñavalkya Smṛti's references to *kula*, *śreṇī*, *pūga* and *gaṇa*. The four terms are not interchangeable, and modern labels such as guild or corporation should not decide their meaning. Their sense has to come from the verses and the commentary, which I treat as related but distinct layers of evidence.

3.3 Research Gap and Contribution

Earlier scholars have treated corporate groups and rulers, pluralism in Buddhist monastic law, and the ranking of forums in 2.30. My contribution is more limited. I read verses on adjudication, collective agreements and royal discipline together, under the heads of recognition, hierarchy and control, and I keep the root text apart from the Mitākṣarā's interpretation. I do not claim that these arrangements were applied uniformly across early India. The argument is textual and interpretive.

4. Conceptual Framework: Legal Pluralism and State-in-Society

I pair legal pluralism with the state-in-society approach. Pluralism points to more than one source of normative authority. State-in-society asks how political authority deals with social institutions that are competing for the power to make rules. These are my tools, not categories found in the Sanskrit. I apply them to the root verses and to the Mitākṣarā separately.

4.1 Legal Centralism and the Pluralist Critique

For Griffiths (1986), legal centralism is the assumption that law is, and should be, a unified system made and run by the state. Pluralism answers by pointing to social fields in which more than one normative order is at work. Griffiths draws a line inside it. In the weak, juristic form, the state itself recognises or arranges various bodies of law. In the strong, social-scientific form, several normative orders coexist whether or not the state acknowledges them.

That line limits what the Yājñavalkya Smṛti can prove. Read as evidence, the text shows the arrangements it recognises or prescribes: what it assigns to the king, to adjudicatory bodies and to named collectives. It cannot show how those bodies governed themselves in every region or period. My argument is accordingly about the text, not about how early Indian law operated everywhere.

4.2 From Classic to New Legal Pluralism

Merry (1988) distinguishes two phases. Classic legal pluralism dealt mostly with indigenous and colonial legal systems meeting one another. The newer approach treats plural ordering as a general feature of social life and asks how official institutions relate to forms of ordering that are tied to the state but not absorbed by it. Tamanaha (2008, 2021) is sceptical, too, that law ever existed as one system under a state monopoly.

What I take from this literature is a set of questions. The issue is not whether the king or the collectives hold authority. It is how the text recognises collective norms, how it orders the bodies that apply them, and how it describes royal intervention. Verse 2.30 gives direct evidence of a ranked set of adjudicatory bodies. How that ranking is understood has to be checked separately in the Mitākṣarā (Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.30; Mitākṣarā on 2.30; Rāya, 2015). Davis (2005, pp. 92–117) puts corporate groups into wider discussions of law and political authority in medieval India. My focus stays on recognition, hierarchy and control across selected passages.

4.3 Defining Law for This Study

Legal pluralism has a standing difficulty: what counts as law? Define law as state-made rules and other normative authority is excluded before the analysis begins. Count every social convention as law and the term stops doing any work (Griffiths, 1986; Merry, 1988; Tamanaha, 2008). My route is text-specific. I look at the norms and procedures that the Yājñavalkya Smṛti itself presents as authoritative in matters of agreement, adjudication or royal supervision.

The Sanskrit terms stay as the source's own categories. *Dharma*, as used here, is the text's normative framework, and *vyavahāra* is adjudication and legal procedure. *Kula*, *śreṇī*, *pūga* and *gaṇa* are the collective bodies named in the passages I study. I do not assume that any of them matches family, guild, corporation or municipality. When the root verse leaves a term undefined, the Mitākṣarā is read as a separate interpretive layer.

4.4 The State-in-Society Approach

Migdal (2001) does not treat the state as an isolated and all-powerful entity. In his account it is one part of a social field where organisations and actors compete to shape rules and outcomes, and where state institutions and social groups may cooperate, compete or constrain each other. He built the approach for

modern states, so I use it only as a sensitising concept for a historical text.

What the approach does for me is change the question. "Is the king sovereign?" gives way to "how is authority distributed and supervised?" The passages present the king, royal appointees and collective bodies as participants in one normative and adjudicatory arrangement. I do not assume that these bodies were independent of the king, or that they were merely his agents. The verses and the Mitākṣarā have to settle that.

4.5 Three Analytical Dimensions

Combining the two frameworks gives three dimensions for the close reading in Section 6. These organise the evidence. None is a conclusion assumed in advance.

Recognition. Does the text treat agreements, norms or decisions linked to a collective as authoritative, and on what conditions? What matters is whether collective norms appear as real sources of obligation or only as instructions the king happens to pass on.

Hierarchy. In adjudication, how does the text rank the competence of collective bodies against that of royal officials? The sequence in 2.30 matters most here. Any claim about appeal must separate the wording of the verse from the fuller reading in the Mitākṣarā.

Control. When does the text authorise the king to enforce agreements, correct collective bodies, or punish actions that depart from prescribed norms or harm others? This looks at the limits of collective authority as well as the reach of royal supervision.

4.6 Analytical Models to Be Tested

The three dimensions let me compare the evidence with three provisional models. In *parallel plurality*, collective norms are recognised but stay largely apart from royal ranking and supervision. In *nested, state-supervised pluralism*, collective norms or decisions are recognised within stated limits, adjudicatory bodies are ranked in a wider order, and the king keeps powers of enforcement or correction. In *delegated authority*, collective bodies act mainly as the king's agents and depend on royal authorisation.

These are analytical alternatives, not historical labels from the Yājñavalkya Smṛti. I test them against selected verses and the Mitākṣarā's explanations, and I keep "nested, state-supervised pluralism" only as far as the evidence supports the combination of recognition, hierarchy and control.

4.7 Scope and Limits of the Framework

The framework has two limits. Legal pluralism and state-in-society are modern concepts applied backwards in time, and Yājñavalkya and Vijñāneśvara did not use them. And prescriptions do not establish practice by themselves. I therefore keep three things apart: the root text, the Mitākṣarā's interpretation, and my own analytical inference.

5. Text, Edition and Method

5.1 The text and its commentary

The Yājñavalkya Smṛti has three parts: the Ācārādhyāya on conduct, which includes the king's duties; the Vyavahārādhyāya on adjudication and the titles of law; and the Prāyaścittādhyāya on expiation. Its rules on collective bodies lie in the first two. The Ācāra part treats the king's relation to such bodies as a matter of royal duty. The Vyavahāra part treats them as parties to agreements and as bodies that hear cases.

The smṛti leaves most of its own terms undefined. The verse that ranks courts names pūgas, śreṇīs and kulas without saying what they are. Definitions come from Vijñāneśvara's commentary, the Mitākṣarā. Since the commentary adds definitions, examples and limits that the verses lack, I report in two separate steps what a verse says and what the Mitākṣarā adds.

5.2 Editions and numbering

I use the Yājñavalkya Smṛti with Vijñāneśvara's Mitākṣarā and the Hindi explanation edited and translated by Dr. Gaṅgāsāgara Rāya (Yājñavalkyasmṛti, 2015). It prints the root Sanskrit verse, the Hindi meaning and the Sanskrit commentary together. For the Ācārādhyāya passages (1.343 and 1.361), I check the reading against J. R. Gharpure's 1936 translation of the Mitākṣarā and Vīramitrodaya. The Vyavahārādhyāya passages are checked against Rāya's edition. Verse numbers are my main locator, since they are more stable across editions than page numbers. I give Rāya's printed page numbers only where they are clearly visible in the scans I have: 2.30, pp. 94–95, and 2.186, p. 467. For the other passages I cite the verse and, where needed, the commentary on it, and I supply no page number I could not verify.

Numbering differs between editions. Röer and Montriou number the verse on conquered territory 1.342 and the verse on correcting deviant groups 1.360. In the recension I use they are 1.343 and 1.361, and I use these numbers throughout.

5.3 Selection of passages

The analysis rests on nine groups of verses: 1.343, 1.361, 2.30, 2.186, 2.187, 2.188–2.191, 2.192, 2.211 and 2.249–2.250. I found them by searching the Sanskrit text for *kula*, *śreṇī*, *pūga*, *gaṇa*, *naigama*, *pāṣaṇḍin*, *saṃvid* and *samaya*, and by reading the verses around each hit. The list is not exhaustive. Verses on the royal court in general, on witnesses, and on partnership (*sambhūyasamutthāna*) touch the subject only indirectly, and I leave them for later work.

5.4 Custom and the sources of dharma

Verse 1.7 names the roots of dharma as the Veda, smṛti, the conduct of good people (*sadācāra*), what is agreeable to oneself, and a desire born of right resolve. The Mitākṣarā reads *sadācāra* as the conduct of good or eminent people (*śiṣṭas*), not of bad ones. Bālambhaṭṭa's gloss adds that the plural excludes, as a

rule, a single person's doubtful act (Vidyarnava, 1918, 13–14). "What is agreeable to oneself" covers, in the commentary, only matters in which the law allows options. So in its theory of sources, custom passes through the conduct of eminent people. The passages I examine do not identify kulas, śreṇīs or pūgas with that class.

Their usages enter the law by other routes: through adjudication (2.30), through agreements (2.186–2.192), and through the rule on conquered territory (1.343). In the Ācāra part the Mitākṣarā also lets a settled family usage decide among options that the śāstra leaves open (Vidyarnava, 1918, 345–46 and 357–58). I therefore do not assume that group custom is a source of dharma in the Mitākṣarā's own scheme. I ask how the text lets group norms operate.

5.5 Terms

Kula I render as kin-group. On 2.30 the Mitākṣarā describes kulas as groups of *jñāti*, *sambandhin* and *bāndhava*; Rāya's 2015 edition presents the root verse and commentary together. On 1.361 it speaks of the kulas of Brāhmaṇas and others. Röer and Montriou render *kulāni* there as "casts" and Vidyarnava as "families or castes". I follow neither, because the Sanskrit gloss names kulas "of Brāhmaṇas and the rest".

Pūga is a group of people of different castes and occupations who live in one place, such as a village or town (Mitākṣarā on 2.30).

Śreṇī is a body of people who live by one trade or craft, drawn from one caste or several (Mitākṣarā on 2.30 and 2.192).

Gaṇa is the body of people of a village or similar locality on 2.187, and a group living by one occupation, such as the Āyudhīyas, on 2.192.

Naigama and *pāṣaṇḍin* are glossed on 2.192 by their attitude to the Veda. The former accept its authority because it was composed by a reliable person, as the Pāśupatas do. The latter reject it.

5.6 Limits

This is a study of a normative text and a medieval commentary. It can show what the text recognises, ranks and controls. It cannot show how groups acted. The Mitākṣarā is a later reader, and its definitions may reflect its own time. I use only the Mitākṣarā as a commentary. Others, such as those of Viśvarūpa and Aparārka, may read the verses differently, and comparing them is left for later work. When I say "the text", I mean the verse as read through the commentary, and I mark the places where the commentary adds a limit absent from the verse. One such place is the condition, made explicit in the Mitākṣarā's reading of 1.343, that local usages are kept only if they do not conflict with the śāstra.

6. Analysis: Recognition, Hierarchy and Control

6.1 Recognition

Verse 2.186 is the clearest statement that a norm may arise from convention or agreement (*samaya*): *nijadharmāvirodhena yuktaṃ sāmāyiko bhavet / so 'pi yatnena saṃrakṣyo dharmo rājākṛtaś ca yaḥ* (Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.186). The root verse says that a *sāmāyika* norm, when compatible with the relevant dharma, is to be protected carefully, as is the dharma established by the king. Collective agreement and royal rule thus sit in the same normative discussion. The Mitākṣarā explains the terms and gives examples, including the protection of pastures, water and temples. It also limits the accepted norm by reference to Śruti and Smṛti. And it applies the term *sāmāyika* to royal rules too, which blurs any simple opposition between agreement and royal command. (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.186; Mitākṣarā on 2.186; Rāya, 2015, p. 467).

The verse sits in a passage that begins with the king settling learned Brāhmaṇas in his city (2.185). The Mitākṣarā reads 2.186 inside that passage and then reads 2.192 as extending the same rule to other bodies. Recognition of the śreṇī, the naigama, the pāṣaṇḍin and the gaṇa is therefore derived from a model case.

Verse 2.187 shows enforcement of a group covenant: *gaṇadravyaṃ hared yas tu saṃvidaṃ laṅghayec ca yaḥ / sarvasvaharaṇaṃ kṛtvā taṃ rāṣṭrād vipravāsayet*. The root verse prescribes confiscation and banishment for taking a gaṇa's property or violating its *saṃvid*. The Mitākṣarā explains the scope of *saṃvid* and separates the serious case from lesser violations, pointing to penalties discussed in Manu. The distinction matters: the verse states the sanction, and the commentary shapes its application (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.187; Mitākṣarā on 2.187).

Verses 2.188–2.191 describe authority inside a group and its dealings with the king. The root text expects members to heed those who speak for the group's welfare. It also regulates how the king receives people who come to him on association business (2.189), how property received by a delegate is handled (2.190), and what qualifications the group's executives need (2.191). The Mitākṣarā explains the expressions and reads the executives' required knowledge of dharma as Vedic and Smṛti learning. These provisions show a prescribed internal organisation and formal dealings with the king. They do not establish a general system of representative government (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.188–2.191; Mitākṣarā on 2.189–2.191).

Verse 2.192 extends the preceding rule to śreṇīs, naigamas, pāṣaṇḍins and gaṇas: *śreṇinaigamapāṣaṇḍigaṇānām apy ayaṃ vidhiḥ / bhedaṃ caiṣāṃ nṛpo rakṣet pūrvavṛttiṃ ca pālayet*. The root verse tells the king to protect their *bheda* and preserve their prior practice. The Mitākṣarā glosses

bheda as *dharmavyavasthāna* and explains the groups and their usages, and it relates *pūrvavṛtti* to established occupation or practice. Rāya's 2015 edition gives the Sanskrit commentary beside the Hindi explanation. The reading of *bheda* as "schism" should not be attributed to the Mitākṣarā. Its explanation concerns the groups' established arrangements and distinctive practices (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.192; Mitākṣarā on 2.192; Rāya, 2015).

Verse 1.343 concerns usages in a territory that has come under royal control: *yasmin deśe ya ācāro vyavahāraḥ kulasthitiḥ / tathaiva paripālyo 'sau yadā vaśam upāgataḥ*. The root verse directs that the established practices, procedures and family arrangements of that territory be kept once the king controls it. The Mitākṣarā adds a qualification: usages that conflict with the śāstra are not to be preserved. The condition of royal control is thus explicit in the verse, while the limit concerning the śāstra is explicit only in the commentary. The passage is limited evidence for the status of local custom and is no blanket guarantee of every local practice (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 1.343; Mitākṣarā on 1.343).

Verse 2.211 prescribes graded penalties for insults: the highest for the Traividyas, the king and deities; the middle for jātis and pūgas; the lower for a village or region. The Mitākṣarā further explains the category of pūga. The verse treats collective bodies as objects of legally graded protection, and the commentary clarifies which categories the rule covers (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.211; Mitākṣarā on 2.211).

Recognition in these passages is conditional in four ways. A norm must not contradict one's own dharma, which the Mitākṣarā reads as Vedic and smṛti dharma, nor, for conquered usage, the śāstra (2.186, 1.343). The recognition of śreṇīs and similar bodies is derived from the Traividya case (2.192). Internal authority is backed by royal penalties (2.187–2.191). And the executives who exercise it must meet a standard of learning and probity (2.191).

6.2 Hierarchy

Verse 2.30 ranks the bodies relevant to adjudication: *nṛpeṇādhikṛtāḥ pūgāḥ śreṇayo 'tha kulāni ca / pūrvaṃ pūrvaṃ guru jñeyaṃ vyavahāravidhau nṛṇām*. The root verse says that in adjudicatory procedure each body earlier in the sequence is to be regarded as weightier. In Rāya's edition the commentary on the verse appears on printed pages 94–95. The verse names the sequence. It does not spell out a complete appeal procedure (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.30, pp. 94–95). The Mitākṣarā explains the relative authority of those who hear cases, identifies the king's appointees with the assessors mentioned at 2.2, and describes the other bodies. It then draws a procedural consequence: a party cannot reopen a decision of a higher-ranked body before a lower-ranked one, while recourse upward may remain open. After a kula's decision, a party may approach the śreṇī and then a pūga; after a śreṇī's decision, the pūga; after a pūga's decision, the king's appointees. This appeal logic belongs to the commentary's interpretation and not to the wording of the root verse alone (Mitākṣarā on Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.30; Rāya, 2015).

The Mitākṣarā then cites a verse attributed to Nārada. It lists kulas, śreṇīs, gaṇas, royal appointees and the king, in ascending order, as the foundation of legal proceedings, and it uses the verse to show that recourse to the king remains open after a decision by royal appointees. The commentary then states what follows when the king rehears the case with the earlier and later assessors: the appellant is punished if he loses on a mistaken view, and the earlier assessors are punished if he wins. These details belong to the commentary's discussion of 2.30 and should not be quoted as if Yājñavalkya's root verse stated them (Mitākṣarā on Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.30; Rāya, 2015).

The result is a ranked set of adjudicatory forums, with the king's appointees at the top of the sequence in the root verse. The verse does not say which body must hear every case first. The idea that parties may move upward is the Mitākṣarā's explanation. That distinction is central to my argument: the root text supplies the ranking, and the commentary adds the detailed procedure (Yājñavalkya Smṛti 2.30; Mitākṣarā on 2.30).

Because the Nārada verse gives a similar ladder, with gaṇas where Yājñavalkya has pūgas and the king at the top, the ranking is not peculiar to the Yājñavalkya Smṛti. I rely on the Mitākṣarā alone for how appeal works, and Nārada's own text is left for later comparison.

6.3 Control

Verse 1.361 gives the king a corrective role: *kulāni jātīḥ śreṇīś ca gaṇān jānapadān api / svadharmāc calitān rājā vinīya sthāpayet pathi*. The root verse directs the king to correct kulas, jātis, śreṇīs, gaṇas and people of a region when they depart from their own dharma. The Mitākṣarā glosses these terms with examples: kulas among Brāhmaṇas and others, śreṇīs of betel sellers (*tāmbūlika*), and janapadas associated with artisans (*kāruka*). It also explains that the penalty is bodily or monetary according to the offence. The group-specific examples and the account of the sanction belong to the commentary and not to the root verse (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 1.361; Mitākṣarā on 1.361).

Royal control also reaches collective economic action. Verse 2.249 concerns traders who combine to the harm of labourers and artisans. Verse 2.250 concerns traders who combine to obstruct sales or charge improper or excessive prices. The Mitākṣarā relates the price reference here to a price regulated by the king. These verses support a limited claim: collective economic

action was subject to prescribed royal penalties when it harmed others or disrupted the regulated market. They should not be equated without qualification with modern competition law (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 2.249–2.250; Mitākṣarā on 2.249–2.250).

Verse 2.187, discussed above, is a further instrument of control. By confiscation and banishment the king enforces the group's own covenant against its members.

6.4 The three dimensions together

The passages answer the three questions of Section 4.5 as follows.

Recognition. The verse names agreement as a source of binding norms alongside the king (2.186), although the commentary calls royal rules *sāmāyika* too. Royal penalties back it (2.187–2.191), and it extends from the Traividya case to śreṇīs and similar bodies (2.192). The text conditions the recognition on non-contradiction with one's own dharma, which the Mitākṣarā reads as Vedic and smṛti dharma.

Hierarchy. The bodies that hear cases are ranked, with the king's appointees at the top of the sequence in 2.30 and kulas at the bottom. The Mitākṣarā reads the ranking as allowing recourse from lower to higher forums, and its discussion of Nārada also places the king above the king's appointees.

Control. The king corrects groups that deviate from their own dharma (1.361), enforces their covenants (2.187), and punishes collective action that injures others (2.249–2.250).

These answers fit the nested, state-supervised pluralism defined in Section 4.6. They do not fit parallel plurality, since 2.30 ranks the jurisdictions and 1.361 gives the king a power of correction. They do not fit delegated authority either. Verse 2.186 names agreement as a source of dharma apart from royal rule, although the commentary blurs the line by calling royal rules *sāmāyika* too, and 1.361 measures deviation by the group's own dharma, which the king enforces and does not set. In Griffiths's (1986) terms the text is juristic throughout: the groups' norms are protected by the king's law and bounded by the śāstra. The only hint of a source outside royal command is the separate mention of agreement in 2.186, and it is a slight one.

In Migdal's (2001) terms the text also sets up channels between the king and the groups. Royal appointees sit near the top of the adjudicatory hierarchy, group executives carry the group's authority, and the king is told to honour members who approach him on association business (2.189). The relation of king to group is a ranked arrangement of interaction, with the king's supremacy intact.

These findings concern what the text and its commentary prescribe. They say nothing on how any ruler or group behaved.

7. Discussion

7.1 What the text adds to the pluralist debate

Three features of the passages bear on the debate set out in Section 4.

First, the verse names agreement as a source of binding norms next to the king's command (2.186), although the commentary also calls royal rules *sāmāyika*. Tamanaha (2008, 2021) argues that the picture of a state with a monopoly over law has long misdescribed legal life. The Yājñavalkya Smṛti, read with the Mitākṣarā, supports a narrower claim: its authors did not describe the king as the only maker of binding norms, whatever rulers actually did.

Second, the plurality is ranked. Strong, social-scientific pluralism in Griffiths's (1986) sense lets normative orders coexist whether or not the state acknowledges them. The hierarchy in 2.30 puts the named adjudicatory bodies in a ranked order. The Mitākṣarā reads it as allowing recourse from lower to higher forums, and its discussion of Nārada places the king above the king's appointees. This is juristic pluralism, in which the text orders and recognises the other bodies. Merry (1988) describes the relation between official law and other forms of ordering as connected, separate and dependent. The passages can be read as giving each term concrete content, though Merry's terms were developed for modern settings and the mapping is only an analogy. Groups make agreements and have their own executives (separate). The hierarchy of adjudication and the king's prescribed dealings with members who come on association business join them to royal institutions (connected). Royal penalties back their covenants, and the king's power of correction reaches the groups themselves (dependent).

Third, control follows the group's own dharma (1.361). The king corrects deviation from norms that the group is understood to hold, so his supervision presupposes those norms. Migdal (2001) directs attention to the channels that join parts of the state to groups in society. The text supplies two: royal appointees within the adjudicatory hierarchy, and the king's prescribed reception of members who come on association business (2.189). The second shows formal interaction with the king, but it is not evidence of a general representative institution.

7.2 Comparison with earlier work on Dharmaśāstra and legal pluralism

Davis (2005) places corporate groups in an intermediate realm between household and ruler. The ladder of 2.30 gives the normative side of that picture a specific shape: it runs from the kin-group to the king, with the local and occupational bodies between. Whether inscriptions of the relevant periods show courts of this kind is a question for epigraphic work, and my analysis cannot settle it.

Voyce (2007) reads the Dharmaśāstra as letting groups such as the Buddhist Sangha make their own rules. The passages I examine are consistent with that reading for śreṇīs and gaṇas. They add two conditions: the rules must not contradict Vedic and smṛti dharma (2.186), and those who administer them must meet a standard of learning and probity (2.191). Davis (2012) puts jurisdiction at the centre of pluralism in a tradition of duties, and the ranking in 2.30 is one smṛti-level instance of that concern.

7.3 Readings of the commentary that change the verses

Three interpretive issues in the Mitākṣarā affect how the verses should be read. In 2.192 the commentary glosses *bheda* as *dharmavyavasthāna*, which points to established arrangements or rules of conduct and away from "schism". On 1.361 it explains *kulāni* by the kulas of Brāhmaṇas and others. That supports a kin-group reading here, but the term's scope should not be extended beyond the gloss. In 1.343 the root verse concerns local usages in a territory under royal control, while the Mitākṣarā makes explicit that usages contrary to the śāstra are not to be preserved. These are the commentator's interpretations and should be presented as such, not as the plain wording of the root verses (Mitākṣarā on Yājñavalkya Smṛti 1.343, 1.361 and 2.192).

7.4 Limits and further work

The evidence is prescriptive, and the commentary is a later reader. Two extensions would test my findings. Inscriptions would show whether groups and courts acted as the text describes. Other smṛtis, which the Mitākṣarā itself invokes on several of these verses, including Manu and Nārada, would show how far the ranking of 2.30 is shared and whether their treatment of recourse and royal supervision differs.

8. Conclusion

I asked how the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, read with Vijñāneśvara's Mitākṣarā, represents the relation between the king and collective bodies. Three findings emerge. First, verse 2.186 recognises a norm arising from agreement alongside royal dharma, and the Mitākṣarā explains its conditions and examples. Second, verse 2.30 ranks royal appointees, pūgas, śreṇīs and kulas for adjudication. The fuller account of recourse from lower to higher forums, and the discussion of Nārada's alternative, belong to the Mitākṣarā and not to the root verse alone. Third, verse 1.361 gives the king a corrective role when named groups depart from their own dharma, and the commentary supplies examples of the groups and possible penalties. These are textual prescriptions. They do not prove that the same arrangements operated uniformly in practice (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 1.361, 2.30 and 2.186; Mitākṣarā on those verses; Gharpure, 1936, on 1.361; Rāya, 2015, on 2.30 and 2.186).

In the vocabulary of legal pluralism, this can be read as nested, state-supervised pluralism: collective norms receive recognition, adjudicatory bodies are ranked, and the king keeps powers of enforcement and correction. The argument depends on holding three evidentiary layers apart: what the root verse states, what the Mitākṣarā adds or clarifies, and what I infer through modern analytical concepts. The reading of *bheda* in 2.192, the scope of *kulāni* in 1.361, and the limit on local usages in 1.343 are commentarial readings and not simply the unmediated words of Yājñavalkya.

The findings concern what the text and its commentaries prescribe. They should be tested against inscriptions, other smṛtis and further evidence on adjudicatory practice before anyone uses them to reconstruct historical institutions.

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