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Parenting & child development: Insights from ancient Indian texts

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Abstract

Ancient Indian texts have long been considered a good source for diverse topics including yoga, philosophy, spirituality, values, management, and ethics. However, 'Parenting' seems to have not been explored from the Indian traditional texts despite being loaded with plentiful messages for parents, educationists, and policy makers. This paper aims to fill this vacuity in literature by investigating ancient Indian texts. Through a review of the ancient Indian texts this paper establishes the close relationship between parenting and child development. Indian seers of yore prescribed a code of living through a set of sixteen sacramental rites and we relate this concept to effective parenting.

Based on our understanding of the available literature, we propose that there exists a close relationship between the code of living, parenting practices, and child behavior. We further elaborate the practices enumerated in the Indian traditional texts that deal with development of a child in the formative stages as well as during youth. Further, implications for parenting in terms of parental-duties, parenting-methods, and values are discussed in the light of ancient Indian wisdom. Parents in the contemporary world would get valuable inputs from the Indian wisdom discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Parents, parenting, ancient Indian Wisdom, *Soḍaśa Saṁskāras*

Introduction

Scientists and the developmental-psychologists claim that the learning process starts at a stage when the baby is in the mother's womb itself. Interestingly the Indian traditional texts also emphasize this issue as evident from scriptural references. *Abhimanyu* (*Arjuna's* son) learns the art of penetrating the *Cakravyūha*¹ (a way of arranging the army in war-field) when he was in *subhadra's* womb^[1]. Sage *yājñavalkya* gets the supreme knowledge from his father when he was in his mother's womb^[2]. *Prahlāda* attained supreme *Viṣṇu Bhakti* when Sage *Nārada* taught this to his mother *Kaṣyādhū*^[3]. What one learns from the parents in the formative phases of life provides firm foundation and continues to influence other phases. Sri Aurobindo says, parenting is transfer of values, culture, and knowledge from one generation to the next^[4]. Traditionally, 'sociability' is one of the important values the parents nurtured in their children^[5], where they edify to live cordially with other fellow beings and thus the magnificent 'joint family system' flourished in India since more than 5000 years, which is just 'one roof' for great grandfather, great grandmother, grandmother, grandfather, father, mother, uncles, aunts, sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, granddaughters, grandsons, nephews, and nieces^[6].

Increasing number of research studies has demonstrated that parenting during infancy, childhood, adolescence/pre-youth, and youth significantly contributes to healthy development of the child behavior. Studies have also shown significant relationship between the quality of the parenting processes and child delinquencies like anger, aggression, and violence^[7]. Delinquency surfacing during childhood/adolescence is mostly stable across different phases that could lead to multitude of problems such as juvenile delinquency, adolescent relational problems, and adulthood criminal attitude. Thus parents are often blamed for the delinquencies

¹Throughout the paper the Sanskrit transliterated words appear in italics. The transliteration schema used is based on International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST). IAST allows a lossless Romanization of scripts employed by the Sanskrit language. For more details please see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Alphabet_of_Sanskrit_Transliteration

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of their children. It is essential to correct the childhood delinquency at the earliest to deter delinquency at a later age. This view is underscored in a popular saying: 'If a tender shrub cannot be bent, how you can expect it to bend when fully grown into a massive tree?'

The discharge of parental duties towards the child is 'parenting'. The word 'parenting' is derived from a Latin word 'Pario' meaning "to give life" (not just giving birth). Interestingly, the word 'parenting' is used both as a noun and a verb in English. As a noun, 'parenting' refers to 'the process of caring and raising the child by the parents. As a verb parenting is 'be or act as a father or mother or a care-giver to someone. 'Parenting is highly comprehensive involving a series of variables namely, parental duties, parenting methods, and parental values, through which the child develops learning skills, sociability, behavior, interpersonal relationships, responsibilities, and decision making. Thus 'parenting' encompasses various aspects that mould the overall personality of the child.

The very process of rearing the child is highly pleasurable provided the parents are prepared to assume the responsibility of bringing up the child. Otherwise it might pose a highly challenging task. Parenting is both biological as well as a social process, interacting between parents and the child. If it can serve the emotional needs of the parents, it serves myriad needs of the child namely physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and societal. From the parents' angle, if 'parenting' is discharge of parental duties, from the child's angle, it is the right to get what all is needed when one is totally dependent on the parents.

Further, 'parenting' need not be from biological parents alone. It can be from others also like care-takers, guardians, grandparents, teachers, well-wishers, members of family, and all those who care and nurture the child's personality, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, intellectually, and socially, addressing child's belief systems, attitudes, behaviors, and values. Thus parenting refers to child rearing method across time and context.

In this paper, we deal with parenting from a perspective of how the issue was considered and factored into the living style and practices as evident from ancient Indian texts. Based on our understanding of the available literature, we propose that there exists a close relationship between the code of living, parenting and child behavior. We further elaborate the practices enumerated in the texts that ensure development of a child in the formative stages as well as during youth. Finally the paper presents some of the explicit roles that the parents were playing in the development of the child.

'Parenting' – Indian Traditional Wisdom

In Indian languages, there is no one-word substitute for the word 'parenting'. In *samskṛtam*, we may mean and include both 'māyṛtva' (motherhood) and 'pitṛtva' (fatherhood) to define parenting. Indian traditional wisdom regards parents and *Gurus* as highly revered and are raised to the level of Gods. There are numerous references in Indian ancient texts extolling the importance of parents including *Upaniṣads*, *Epics*, *Purānas* and sayings and compositions of wise and scholarly people. For instance, *taittirīya upaniṣat (śikṣāvalli, Section 11)* proclaims: 'Mother is God, father is God, Guru is God' [8].

मातृदेवो भव पितृदेवो भव आचार्यदेवो भव।

There are many *subhāṣitas* [2] vibrantly glorifying parents, portraying that parents are rare and supreme beings:

जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसि।	Even superior to heaven are mother and motherland [21].
जननी जन्मभूमिश्च जाह्नवी च जनार्दनः जनकः पञ्चमश्रैव जकाराः पञ्च दुर्लभाः।	Mother, Motherland, Ganges, <i>Janārdana</i> , and Father are five ' <i>ja'kāras</i> (words starting with ' <i>Ja</i> ') exceptionally rare and precious [21].
गृहमेव प्रथमपाठशाला, जनन्येव प्रथमगुरुः, धन्याः जनन्याः ज्ञाताः।	Home is the first school; mother is the first teacher, blessed are those who are taught by the mother [21].

In the *vālmīki rāmāyaṇa ayodhyākāṇḍa* (111.9-10) in a conversation between *Rāma* and *Bharata*, *Rāma* extols the virtues of mother and advises *Bharata* to take good care of his mother. *Rāma* says, 'Parents toil unremittingly for their children. They overstretch to provide good food, good couches, and healthy cosmetics. They speak delightfully to please the children. Their acts can never be repaid in full' [9].

यन्माता पितरौ वृत्तं तनये कुरुतः सदा।

न सुप्रतिकरं तत्तु मात्रा पित्रा च यत्कृतम्॥ (111.9)

यथा शक्तिप्रदानेन स्वापनोच्छादनेन च।

नित्यं च प्रियवादेन तथा संवर्धनेन च॥ (111.10)

The importance of parents and parenting is pervasive in the entire Indian culture, as evident from similar ideas expressed in several regional languages. For example, in one of the *sarvajña vacanās* (*Kannaḍa* language) the parental-duties are explained thus, 'The true enemies are: the *Guru* who teaches not; the father who counsels not; and the mother who cares not when the child is fallen' [10, 11].

vidye kalisada guruvu bhuddhi heḷada tandeyu
biddiralu bandu noḍada tāyiyu śuddha vairigaḷu
sarvajñaḥ

According to *Swāmi Vivekānanda*, of all the domains, parenting is to get through constantly and truly fulfill the duties which they owe to their children for having brought them to the worldly existence. Ancient Indian texts offer broad guidelines for such parenting [12].

Samskāras - Indian Traditional Model for Parenting

In Indian traditional wisdom inculcating good discipline, developing a strong character, temperament, and morale in the child is considered the highest priority. The parenting process is defined and formally established through the prescription of parental-duties by way of 'śoḍaśa *samskāras*' (sixteen sacramental rituals) (Table 2). '*Samskāra*' essentially means 'perfecting, refining, or polishing' [13]. Prescribed by the Indian seers who believed in offering superior sanctity to the life of individuals, these *samskāras* have spiritual implications too. Traditionally the Indian sages felt the need for conscious guiding of individuals and they wanted the parents to develop child's personality through these *samskāras*. Every *samskāra*

² In the Indian Knowledge repository '*Subhāṣitas*' are a vast collection of verses containing words of wisdom based on experience, practice and scholarly thinking.

is performed as a grand social gathering inviting relatives, friends, and neighbors, the impact of which is that the child learns hospitality, warmth, and sociability, thus reiterating that parenting method is the first and primary influence on children's conviviality. The child is taught to appreciate the rich heritage of native culture that can save him from degrading influences. Thus the *samskāras* play an important role in the growth and evolution of an individual across different phases of life. Basis for 'phases of life' is not just the 'age' but other vital criteria described in Indian traditional texts namely *āśramas*³ and *puruṣārthas*⁴.

Human being has five *avasthas* (growth phases) namely, *śaiśava* (infancy), *bālya* (childhood), *kaumāra* (adolescence/teenage/pre-youth), *yauvana* (youth), and *vārdhakya* (old age). Traditionally the child will be with the parents till the age of eight. The *upanayana samskāra* (sacred thread investiture) marks the transition of child's role. After *upanayana* the child is sent to a *Gurukulam* (residential school) to undergo rigorous training under the *Guru* (teacher). After a 12 year study period, the child aged about 20 gets other 'samskāras' done. Depending on the *varṇa*⁵ and the quantum of education pursued by the child, it is generally possible that this phase may last up to 25 years, which corresponds to 'brahmacharya āśrama', one of the four 'āśramas' mentioned in Indian philosophy. Figure 1 pictorially portrays this.

Thus, *śaiśava*, *bālya* and *kaumāra* would be in the safekeeping of parents and *Guru*, who would shape the personality of the child and make him a responsible citizen. By tradition, during *bālya*, the parents initiate the child into the basics of education like alphabets, numerals, mathematics and fundamentals of language. Furthermore, the child is also taught to understand the surroundings, neighborhood, hygiene, healthy practices, heritage, traditions, customs, propriety, social etiquette, societal obligations, and the nation. Thus the first decisive responsibility of shaping the personality of an individual rests undoubtedly with the parents during, *śaiśava* and *bālya*. Each child is unique and parents know their children more than anyone else³. The seeds sown during *śaiśava* and *bālya* unfalteringly decide the course of child's life. Thus, the role of parenting in molding the personality of a child cannot be underestimated, as 'delinquency' in child's behavior can sprout mostly from the parents in this phase of life¹⁴.

The most decisive impact of parenting on child is during *śaiśava* (infancy: first two years) and *bālya* (childhood: three to eight years). During this period, the child's world is small comprising of mother, father and oneself, and the child is totally dependent on the parents (particularly mother) for all his/her needs. The child's world without parents is full of apprehension, confusion, and perplexity from all directions. The child reposes great faith in the parents. The child learns the social skills and interaction with the world by observing and imitating the most intimate and significantly dependable ones, in this phase of life who happen to be one's parents. If someone other than parents says something, the child crosschecks with parents either by questioning or observing and then decides to believe or otherwise. If it contradicts with the parents' opinion, the child discards, because the parents

are the role-model, guide, god, and literally everything to the child. Even when the mother punishes or admonishes the child, mother alone is the refuge. Thus, parents' opinions, language, acts, gestures, habits, tastes, hobbies, and vocations have profound impact on the child.

This kind of absolute dependence of the child is reciprocated by the parents through performance of various *samskāras* (sacramental rites). Not surprisingly, more *samskāras* are performed by the parents during the first two phases of one's life.

Indian traditional texts very meticulously explain these *samskāras* as duties of conscientious parents. *manusmṛti* mentions that every individual is born a *śūdra* (last of the four *varṇas*); through *samskāras* the child becomes a *dvija* (twice-born); through Vedic knowledge elevates to a *Vipra* (scholar); and by knowing the *Brahman* (The Supreme) becomes a *Brāhmaṇa*. Thus the whole life of an individual is a celebrated sacrament and Indian traditional texts recommend discharge of parental duties through discharge of these *samskāras*. Therefore, it is not surprising to note that all the *smṛtis*, which are the books of codified principles for good living, discuss the issue of *samskāras* in some detail.

Samskāras from birth to formative stages of a child

According to *manusmṛti* parenting starts even before the formation of fetus in the mother's womb and hence, the 'garbhadāna samskāra' is done for the purification of womb that embraces and nurtures the impending fetus.¹⁵ Further *manusmṛti* says that before severing the umbilical cord, *jātakarma samskāras* (birth rituals) be performed by reciting vedic mantras and the baby be given a mixture of honey and grounded gold¹⁵.

प्राज्ञाभिवर्धनात् पुंसो जातकर्म विधीयते,

मन्त्रवत्प्राशनं चास्य हिरण्यमधुसर्पिषाम्। (*manusmṛti* 2.29)

On the other hand, *yājñavalkyasmṛti* (1.11-12) lists the *samskāras* performed during the early stages of a child beginning from purification of the womb, *garbhadānam* (pre-conception rites for womb purification), before the movement of the foetus – *pumsaḥ* (rituals securing birth of a healthy child), in the sixth or eighth month – *sīmanta* (for protection of fetus and the mother), on delivery of the baby – *jātakarma* (rites on arrival of new born), eleventh day – *nāmakaraṇa* (naming ceremony), in the fourth month – *niṣkramaṇa* (first outing to expose to Sun), in sixth month – *annaprāśanam* (first feeding of solid food), and as applicable to one's family tradition, first or third year - *cūdākāryam* (first hair cut):¹⁶

गर्भदानमृतौ पुंसः सवनं स्पन्दनात्पुरा।

षष्ठेष्टमे वा सीमन्तो अस्येते जातकर्म च॥

(*yājñavalkyasmṛti* 1.11)

अहन्येकादशे नाम चतुर्थे मासि निष्क्रमः।

षष्ठेष्टमे वा सीमन्तो अस्येते जातकर्म च॥

(*yājñavalkyasmṛti* 1.12)

Parents name the baby by which the world identifies him/her. This is traditionally termed as 'Nāmakaraṇa Samskāra'. Parents take great care in choosing the name as good, meaningful and auspicious name would increase the confidence levels of the baby¹⁴. According to *manusmṛti* (2.30) on the tenth or twelfth day naming ceremony may be performed. Otherwise, it can be performed on any other following auspicious day:¹⁵

³ *Āśramas*: Duties and responsibilities: *brahmacharya* (student), *grhastha* (house-holder), *vānaprastha* (delegation of duties and responsibilities to sons), *sanyāsa* (renunciation of worldly life).

⁴ *Puruṣārthas*: Objectives of life: *Dharma* (sustainable righteousness), *Artha* (wealth), *Kāma* (desire fulfillment), *Mokṣa* (liberation).

⁵ *Varṇas*: *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, *Śūdra*

नामधेयं दशम्यां तु द्वादश्यां वाऽस्य कारयेत्।
पुण्ये तिथौ मुहूर्ते वा नक्षत्रे वा गुणान्विते॥ (manusmṛti 2.30)

Furthermore, guidelines pertaining to naming of the child depending on the *varṇa* and the child's sex are provided in *manusmṛti* (2.31- 33). auspicious name to the *brāhmaṇa*, name denoting valor to the *kṣatriya*, name denoting affluence to *vaiśya*, and a name denoting *jugupsa* to the *śūdra* should be chosen. Name 'śarma' to the *brāhmaṇa*, 'Varma', a name denoting 'protection' to the *kṣatriya*, affluence denoting 'Gupta' to the *vaiśya*, and 'Dāsa' to the *śūdra* should be chosen. Pleasurable, yielding, clear, auspicious, ending with long vowels, and blessed names should be chosen for girl babies:

मङ्गल्यं ब्राह्मणस्य स्यात्क्षत्रियस्य बलान्वितम्।
वैश्यस्य धनसंयुक्तं शूद्रस्य तु जुगुप्सितम्॥ (manusmṛti 2.31)

शर्मवद्ब्राह्मणस्य स्याद्राज्ञो रक्षासमन्वितम्।
वैश्यस्य पुष्टिसंयुक्तं शूद्रस्य प्रेष्यसंयुतम्॥ (manusmṛti 2.32)

स्त्रीणां सुखोद्यमक्रूरं विस्पष्टार्थं मनोहरम्।
मङ्गल्यं धीर्धवर्णान्तमाशीर्वादाभिधानवत्॥ (manusmṛti 2.33)

Guidelines are also provided for matters related to child's first outing (*Niṣkramaṇam*) and first feeding of solid food (*Annaprāśanam*). first outing to expose the baby to the sun be done in fourth month, and first feeding of solid food in sixth month. If this is not possible, any auspicious day as per one's family tradition may be chosen ^[15]:

चतुर्थे मासि कर्तव्यं शिशोर्निष्क्रमणं गृहात्।
षष्ठेऽन्नप्राशनं मासि यद्रेष्टं मङ्गलं कुले॥ (manusmṛti 2.34)

The other issue discussed is the child's first hair cut. *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya* should perform child's first hair cut in the first or third year, according to Vedic rituals:

चूडाकर्म द्विजातीनां सर्वेषामेव धर्मतः।
प्रथमेऽब्दे तृतीये वा कर्तव्यं श्रुतिचोदनात्॥ (manusmṛti 2.35)

The developmental psychologists and Indian traditional texts place the act of breast-feeding on a high pedestal. Through breast-feeding during *śaiśava*, mother establishes a strong emotional bondage with the child; the mother becomes the most adorable icon to the child throughout the life. It was observed that among an archaic sect of people called 'Soligas' in Karnataka, a southern state in India, there are hardly any infights or criminal acts. A study of possible reasons for this phenomenon led to the revelation of an interesting fact. The sect apparently follows a practice that any new born baby in the sect should be breast-fed by all the women (even if there is no milk in breasts). This age-old practice could have intensified the emotional bondage with all the women in the sect in addition to the biological mother, resulting in minimum infights and criminal acts ^[17].

The level of detailing and care taken to specify several of these *saṃskāras* right from the stage when the fetus is in the womb up to the formative stages of child is simply baffling. However, it speaks of the importance given to the issue of child upbringing. It also emphasizes the critical role of parents in shaping up the personality of the growing child.

Samskāras for making of a fine individual

The next set of *saṃskāras* defines the path for the child as the transition happens from *Bālya* to *Kaumāra*. Being steadfast in *brahmacarya*, a *dvija* (*brāhmaṇa*) should spend first one-fourth (25 years) of his life in *Gurukulam* (while serving the *Guru*). In the second one-fourth (25 years) he should marry and lead the life a house holder ^[15].

चतुर्थमायुषो भागमुषित्वाद्यं गुरौ द्विजः।
द्वितीयमायुषो भागं कृतदारो गृहे वसेत्॥ (manusmṛti 4.1)

In the Indian tradition the transition of the child from *Bālya* to *Kaumāra* is marked by an important *saṃskāra* called *upanayanam* (sacred thread investiture). In *Gurukulam*, the child is initiated into *saṃskāras* like 'Vedārambha' (beginning of scriptural education) preceded by the *upanayana saṃskāra* in the presence of parents. This has to be conducted by the parents before the child is sent for formal education under the guidance of a *Guru*. According to *manusmṛti* (2.36) the *upanayana saṃskāra* must be performed in the eighth, eleventh, and twelfth year to the *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas* respectively ^[15].

गर्भाष्टमेऽब्दे कुर्वीत ब्राह्मणस्योपनायनम्।
गर्भादिकादशे राज्ञो गर्भात्तु द्वादशे विशः॥ (manusmṛti 2.36)

In case of any constraints, *upanayana saṃskāra* can also be performed in 16th, 22nd, and 24th year to *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas* respectively (2.38) ^[15].

आषोडशाद्ब्राह्मणस्य सावित्री नातिवर्तते।
आर्द्राविंशत् क्षत्रबन्धोराचतुर्विंशतेर्विशः॥ (manusmṛti 2.38)

Normally the child will be under the custody of *Guru* in *Gurukulam* from 8 to 25 years of age. This period may be considered as parenting by *Guru*. The two societal institutions namely home and *Gurukulam* form the most important social arrangements in the development of an individual. Traditionally, *Guru* and the parents cannot work in isolation as it may have a detrimental impact on the children. Thus, during the child's stay in *Gurukulam*, the parents would be made to visit the *Gurukulam* at periodical intervals (once in two/three months) and stay in *Gurukulam* for 2 to 3 days to interact with the *Guru* and the child. These meetings would dispel gaps/doubts among them and nurture healthy relations among the child, parents, and the *Guru*. The *Guru* also counsels the parents and the child to help build strong bondage between them and to understand their respective rights and duties.

Thus the parents play a very important role even while the child is under the safekeeping of *Guru*. Based on the gender of the child, the *Guru* calls upon the parents to initiate *saṃskāras* that were traditionally considered integral duties of responsible parents towards their children, which have spiritual implications too ^[18]. Thus the role of parents is indispensable even when the child is in *Gurukulam*. It is therefore no wonder that in the ancient Indian texts the parents and the *Gurus* were celebrated with great reverence.

Parenting Methods and Values

A careful reading of the ancient Indian texts reveals interesting dimensions pertaining to parenting methods. According to ancient Indian texts, parenting is an assiduous act demanding much perseverance and sincerity and their

sheer love aims at providing the best to the children. The parental mission is to give the finest citizen to the nation. This implies that the parenting is integral duty revolving round the needs of children aimed at providing the necessary dexterities to face any unforeseen eventualities in life. Diana Baumrind proposed three parenting methods viz., authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive^[19]. Indian traditional texts bring out several dimensions of parenting, which are comparable to these.

1. Parenting is intense love

Animals are far superior to the human beings when the question of parenting comes. By instinct, they care their eggs/siblings. The great epic *Mahābhārata* advises human beings to learn the art of parenting from the animal world and cautions against any negligence in discharge of parental duties. It brings out the fact that even tiny creatures like ants take utmost care of their eggs and siblings. They never allow their eggs to be destroyed. Being a learned scholar how can you be without loving your own siblings?'^[1].

अण्डानि बिभ्रति स्वानि न भिन्दन्ति पिपीलिकाः।
न भरेथाः कथं नु त्वम् धर्मजः सन्स्वमात्मजम्॥
(*Mahābhārata ādīparva, Saṁbhavaparva, Adhyāya*
74, Verse 55)

Similarly in *Rāmāyaṇa, (Ayodhyākāṇḍa, 74.14)* it was mentioned, 'The child is born out of parents' heart. Thus he is like an organ (of body). Hence while other relatives are dear, the child is dearest to the parents'^[9].

अङ्ग प्रत्यङ्गजः पुत्रो हृदयाच्छाभिजायते।
तस्मात् प्रियतरो मातुः प्रिय एव तु बान्दवाः॥ (74.14)

This intense love makes the parents to give their best to the children (even then the parents are not satisfied). On another occasion, *Rāmāyaṇa, (Ayodhyākāṇḍa, 25.22)* illustrates how the parental blessings are always filled with intense love. On the parting meeting between *Rāma* and his mother, the mother says, 'From those who travel in the space and land, from all the deities and foes, let only the auspicious be showered on you'^[9].

स्वस्ति तेऽस्त्वान्तरिक्षेभ्यः पार्थिवेभ्यः पुनःपुनः।
सर्वेभ्यश्चैव देवेभ्यो ये च ते परिपन्थिनः॥ (25.22)

2. Parenting is being true Guru (teacher)

Till the child is sent to the *Gurukulam*, the parents have a dual role to play: parents' role and teachers' role. In their role as teachers parents kindle the children's inquisitiveness and encourage them to have quest for higher knowledge. Moreover, effective parenting ensures that the parents forever play the role of a teacher at all stages of a child's growth. Often it was found that even in the pursuit of higher knowledge the children get their doubts clarified from parents. In *taittirīya upaniṣat, bhṛguvalli* (3.1-10), father *varuṇa* (as a prudent teacher) leads his son *bhṛgu*, step by step, to the realization of the supreme knowledge through unserving practice^[8]. In *chāndogya upaniṣat* (6.16), father *uddālaka* imparts the highest knowledge to his son *śvetakētu*^[20].

3. Parenting is offering freedom to grow

The very idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parents is barbarous and a foolish thinking. Every child

is born with certain inherent qualities and it is impossible to change them. Thus the very notion that the child develops particular qualities, capabilities, ideas, virtues as per the wishes of the parents can be greatest of the errors. The child must be induced and encouraged to expand in line with his own nature. Bringing out the natural abilities in children is the essence of parenting. Also a prudent parent should know when to offer protection/support and when to offer freedom. Though the parents show warmth in their approach, they should not fail to set strict standards or limits within which the child is expected to operate.

Child's freedom is fertile soil to grow and blossom. Otherwise child becomes rusted and stops progressing. This kind of freedom can be approved by the parents as the child starts thinking independently, owing to maturity. This idea of changing role of the parents as the child grows is brought out in a *subhāṣita*, 'Up to fifth year son has to be loved; up to tenth year give him good education like a disciplinarian; after sixteenth year treat him like a friend'^[21].

लालयेत् पञ्च वर्षाणि दश वर्षाणि ताडयेत्।
प्राप्ते तु षोडशे वर्षे पुत्रं मित्रवदाचरेत्॥

4. Parenting is to guide

One of the roles that a good parenting provides is to develop a sense of realism in the child. The parents should make the child realise that just personal happiness is not the goal of life. They should awaken the child progressively towards social welfare. Parenting is to suggest and not to impose, nor to pamper. Parents do not actually train the child's mind, they only show the way to perfection and discipline the instrument of knowledge and help and encourage in the process. Further, parents do not impart knowledge, instead, they show the way to acquire the knowledge for himself. A *subhāṣita* highlights this view: 'Too much of pampering might spoil the children and disciples. Disciplining them might help them to develop certain good qualities. Hence, instead of pampering it is better to discipline them'^[21].

ललनात् बहवो दोषाः तर्जनाद्बहवो गुणाः।
तस्मात् पुत्रं च शिष्यं च तर्जयेत् न तु लालयेत्॥

The parents are not task masters or strict disciplinarians, they are helpers and guides. When such duties are not discharged in the best interest of the child the parents virtually destroy the personality of the child: 'Parents themselves would be the enemies who fail to give right education to the child. Like a crane which is inappropriately to be found among swans, such a child fails to be identified among intellectuals'^[21].

माता शत्रुः पिता वैरी येन बालो न पाठितः।
न शोभते सभामध्ये हंसमध्ये बकोयथा॥ (*Subhāṣita*)

5. Parenting is legacy of values

Aurobindo says, if our schools, colleges, and Universities can produce doctors, engineers, and lawyers, the value addition with *samskāras* is that, our children can become genius doctors, excellent engineers, superior lawyers, great administrators, and adroit leaders^[4]. If the circumstances and the environment are conducive, one can surely blossom. Plants vary according to soil quality. Cautioning about the danger of negative parenting, a *subhāṣita* says, 'A snake's son can only be a snake'^[21]. *sarpasya putraḥ sarpaiva bhavati*.

On similar lines the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, 35.28) says, ‘Son develops the qualities of the father, whereas daughter that of the mother. This maxim is true to its core’ [9].

सत्याश्चात्र प्रवादोऽयं लौकिकः प्रतिभाति मा
पितृन् समनुजायन्ते नरा मातर मङ्गनाः॥ (35.28)

When the path to perfection is already established by the elders, there should be no hesitation to tread that path. One should carry on and tread the divine path in which the parents and the grandparents have flourished. Such a person would never be annihilated, proclaimed another *Subhāṣita*: [21]

एनास्य पितरो याताः येन याताः पितामहा।

तेन यायात् सतां मार्गं तेन गच्छन् न रिष्यते॥

The multiple dimensions of parenting point to the fact that parents play multiple roles and it is a process by which all the elements of the child could be organized into a homogeneous whole. This task of unification demands a great care and diligence, and to achieve it, parents apply themselves and their limited resources with utmost patience and care. Equipped with supple but rich heritage, the child is likely to be armed with psychic discipline, character, moral strength, and sociability. Thus this traditional wisdom through *ṣoḍaśa saṃskāras* will have positive reactions on child’s refined character, which can keep him away from perverse situations.

Table 1: Developmental phases of life and *saṃskāras*

Phase of Life	Child Responsibilities	<i>ṣoḍaśa saṃskāras</i>
<i>garbhāvāsa</i> (in mother’s womb)	Not applicable	1. <i>Garbhādāna</i> (Pre consummation rites) Pre-natal saṃskāras 2. <i>Puṃsavana</i> (3 rd month pregnancy) Securing birth of healthy child 3. <i>sīmantonnayana</i> (6 th /8 th month of pregnancy) For protection of carrying mother and her womb.
<i>Śaiśava</i> (Infancy) (up to 2 years)	No responsibilities	Childhood saṃskāras 4. <i>Jātakarma</i> (on birth) Post-natal purification (birth time/date is noted to prepare birth-chart/ <i>Jātakam</i>) 5. <i>Nāmakaraṇa</i> (11 th day) Naming ceremony 6. <i>Karṇavedhana</i> (3 rd month) Piercing the earlobes (wearing ear ornaments) 7. <i>niṣkramaṇa</i> (3 rd /4 th month) Exposing infant to outside world or first outing. (3 rd month: expose to Sun, 4 th month: expose to moon) 8. <i>Annaprāśana</i> (6 th month) – First feeding of solid food 9. <i>Chaulam</i> (3 rd year) – Tonsure (baby’s first haircut/head shave)
<i>Bālya</i> (Childhood) Age 3 to 12 Under parents – Age 3 to 8 Under Guru – Age 9 to 12	Learning Alphabets, Fundamentals of language, Mathematics. Education in <i>Gurukulam</i> : <i>śāstra/Vedābhyāsa</i>	Education saṃskāras 10. <i>Akṣarābhyāsa</i> or <i>Vidyārambha</i> (4 th year) 11. <i>Upanayanam</i> (8 th year) 12. <i>Vedārambha</i> (9 th year) 13. <i>Keśānta</i> or <i>Ritūśuddhi</i> (According to the <i>Varṇa</i> one belongs to)
<i>Kaumāra</i> (Pre Youth) Age 13 – 19	Education in <i>Gurukulam</i> : <i>śāstra/Vedābhyāsa</i>	
<i>Yauvana</i> (Youth) Age 20 – 25 Age 26 – 59	Education in <i>Gurukulam</i> : <i>śāstra/Vedābhyāsa</i> . Householder.	14. <i>Samāvartana</i> (Convocation) At the completion of studies - 25 th year Marriage saṃskāra 15. <i>Vivāha</i>
<i>Vārdhākya</i> (Old Age) Age 60 and above Phase 1 – Age 60 – 79 Phase 2 – Age 80 and above	Delegation of duties to children/successors. Renunciation of material life and aim for liberation.	<i>Vānaprastha</i> (<i>Vanāgamana</i>) Death saṃskāras 16. <i>Anthyeṣṭi</i> (Death rituals)

Source: Own research

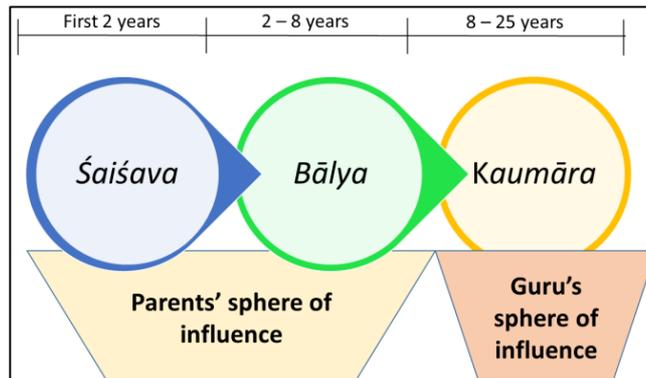


Fig 1: Parents’ & Guru’s role in shaping the child during first 25 years

Conclusion

Ancient Indian texts are affluent sources for very valuable guidelines for parents. Besides establishing parental duties towards the children by the prescription of *ṣoḍaśa saṃskāras*, Indian traditional texts also offer valuable inputs for positive parenting and warn the hazardous effect of negative parenting. The successful dispense of this knowledge base can be ensured only on its introduction in the school and college curriculum and the developmental psychologists, educationists, and policy makers should also contribute for the effective dissemination of this wisdom. A curriculum part in schools and colleges would surely help our children to have access to this huge valuable knowledge base. Due to space-constraint, the authors found it difficult to bring out all that is available in Indian traditional texts that deal with parenting. Hence, this huge Indian traditional wisdom offers scope for further mining. A future effort in this direction is likely to add more value to the current work.

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