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Securing a Child's Place in the World: Extended *Vātsalya* in Indian Knowledge Systems

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Abstract

This paper develops extended vātsalya as a framework for examining how parental and parent-like care shapes a child's place in familial, educational, institutional, and political life. Through qualitative close reading and controlled comparison, it analyses six relationships from the ChāndogyaUpaniṣad, the Mahābhārata, and the VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa: Jabālā-Satyakāma, Adhiratha-Rādhā-Karṇa, Drupada and his queen-Śikhaṇḍin, Śakuntalā-Kaṇva-Bharata, Kaikeyī-Bharata, and Vāli-Aṅgada.

The study proposes a six-part typology of intervention: truthful preparation, secure family incorporation, protected role formation, representative advocacy, succession planning, and transitional guardianship. It argues that such intervention supports responsible social formation when it rests on truth, responds to age and need, serves the child's well-being, and leaves room for consent and agency. It becomes ethically unstable when concealment, parental ambition, or unilateral planning exposes the child to risk or conflicts with the child's considered judgment. By distinguishing social placement from social formation, the paper shows how parental influence shapes later experience and conduct without eliminating personal responsibility, explained through the *svabhāva*-saṃskāra-*svānubhava* framework and *kartṛ-bhāva*.

Keywords: *vātsalya*; Indian Knowledge Systems; parenting; social placement; social formation; *svabhāva*; *saṃskāra*; *svānubhava*; *kartṛ-bhāva*; guardianship; recognition; agencySecuring a Child's Place in the World: Extended *Vātsalya* in Indian Knowledge Systems
Neeraja Sheth and Dr. L. Sampath Kumar

Introduction

Parental care is often discussed through affection, nourishment, protection, and instruction. A further responsibility arises when the child enters a world beyond the household or must retain a place after a change in family or political authority. This may require a truthful account of identity, family membership, preparation for a role, advocacy before authority, access to specialised education, or continuity of protection when a parent can no longer remain present. Parents cannot determine every outcome, but their actions shape the conditions under which the child seeks acceptance, recognition, and stability.

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This paper defines "extended *vātsalya*" as parental care directed towards the child's place in social life beyond the household. The category is needed because parenting, guardianship, care ethics, and socialisation each describe part of this process without fully explaining the deliberate parental work of securing, preserving, or renegotiating a child's recognised place across familial, educational, institutional, and political settings.The six cases examine preparation, family incorporation, protected role formation, advocacy, succession planning, and transitional guardianship in anticipation of paternal loss. Their comparison asks when parental support meets a child's need, when parental power cannot reach the place the child seeks, when an existing place must be preserved through disruption, and when parental planning conflicts with the child's judgment. Social placement refers to the place a child is given or recognised as having in the wider world. This may include belonging to a family, gaining access to education, being publicly accepted as a legitimate heir, holding political office, or continuing to receive protection after a parent is gone. Social formation refers to how the child develops as a person - the values, judgment, self-understanding, and sense of responsibility needed to live within that place. Placement concerns the position available to the child, while formation concerns how the child understands, responds to, and takes responsibility within that position. "Child" is used relationally for a son or daughter within a parent–child relationship, while developmental age and capacity are considered separately.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The central question is: How does parental *vātsalya* shape a child's social placement, and under what conditions does that placement support responsible social formation?

The hypothesis is that extended *vātsalya* supports responsible social formation when parental action is truthful, proportionate to the child's age and need, directed towards the child's interests or genuine good, and supportive of developing agency. It becomes ethically unstable when concealment, inherited grievance, or unilateral planning exposes the child to avoidable risk or conflicts with the child's welfare or considered choice.

Parental and wider social influences leave *saṃskāras* that shape later *svānubhava*. Repeated experiences may reinforce or redirect these impressions and contribute to recurrent patterns of *svabhāva*. Within these formative conditions, *kartṛ-bhāva* preserves responsibility for later choices and conduct.

Scholarly Context and Research Gap

Scholarship on Karṇa has largely examined lineage, social status, exclusion, identity conflict, and the search for recognition (B. S. Rai and Manjula 75-87; I. S. Rai 710-17). Roy places Satyakāma within questions of uncertain lineage, access to knowledge, and social boundaries (156-69). Sinha and Bhattacharya examine Śikhaṇḍin through contested gender identity and representation (1-8). Betageri's study of Kālidāsa'sŚakuntalā offers a conceptual parallel concerning the movement from private relationship to public legitimacy, although it does not analyse the *Mahābhārata* narrative examined here (177-84). Srivastava and colleagues provide a broader account of Hindu moral development through the interaction of disposition, instruction, environment, habit, and action (S283-S287).

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These studies illuminate important aspects of the selected narratives, but they do not provide a comparative framework for examining the relational work through which parents and parent-like figures shape a person's recognized social position. Scholarship centred on identity and exclusion generally explains the problem confronting the child or adult, but gives less attention to the capacities, limitations, timing, and ethical quality of familial intervention. Research on socialisation explains the transmission of values, habits, and institutional knowledge, but does not fully account for interventions intended for public recognition, political standing, succession, marital legitimacy, or continuity of care. Guardianship usually refers to responsibility for a minor or dependent person, while parenting is often treated primarily as the formation and protection of children. Neither category by itself adequately describes the continuing, transitional, and sometimes publicly directed interventions examined in these narratives.Existing scholarship therefore tends to examine either the acquisition of social status and recognition or the child's moral and psychological development, without analysing how parental intervention connects, or fails to connect, social placement with social formation.

The present study addresses this gap through the framework of extended *vātsalya*. The term refers to affection expressed as ethically directed action that may continue beyond childhood, extend beyond biological parenthood, and operate outside the private household. It includes efforts to prepare a person truthfully for institutional entry, complete family incorporation, protect a vulnerable identity, advocate for a minor, establish an adult child within succession, preserve social legitimacy, and arrange continuity of care and public responsibility when a parent can no longer remain present. The framework therefore shifts attention from status or identity alone to what these caregivers attempt to do, what forms of authority and knowledge they possess, where their intervention succeeds or reaches its limits, and whether the place they seek for another person accords with *dharma* and that person's own agency.

The selected narratives represent different interventions across educational admission, foster-family belonging, protected princely identity, dynastic recognition, royal succession, and political transition. They reveal both the possibilities and the limits of parental authority.

Research on emerging adulthood likewise recognises that parental responsibility may continue after childhood. Family-life-cycle scholarship describes "launching" as the young person's movement towards adult roles and the family's adjustment as relationships and authority change (Garcia Preto and Blacker 241-54). Swartz and colleagues describe parents as providing "scaffolds" that support progress and "safety nets" that assist when educational, occupational, or personal transitions become difficult (414-29). Van Stee reviews non-financial parental involvement in education, employment, residence, marriage, and other adult transitions, while Lareau shows how families transmit institutional knowledge and familiarity with educational and other authoritative settings.

These approaches clarify how families support movement into adulthood, but they are not designed to evaluate the wider ethical and relational questions raised by the selected narratives. The metaphors of scaffolding and safety nets primarily describe assistance given during transition or difficulty. Extended *vātsalya* also examines attempts to obtain recognition from

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institutions, preserve family and political continuity, transfer responsibility before death or separation, and negotiate the limits between loving intervention and control. It further asks whether the intervention respects the recipient's agency, whether the position being sought is ethically legitimate, and whether affection remains governed by *dharma*. By bringing emotional care, social placement, public recognition, continuity, authority, and moral evaluation into a single comparative account, the study develops a preliminary conceptual model of extended *vātsalya* through a six-part typology of parental intervention.

Method and Sources

The study uses qualitative textual interpretation and controlled cross-case comparison. The Satyakāma account is examined in the *ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* 4.4-10. The Karṇa, Śikhaṇḍin, and Śakuntalā-Bharata narratives are read from the constituted text of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*. The Kaikeyī-Bharata case is examined in P. L. Vaidya's critical edition of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* of the *VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa*, and the Vāli–Aṅgada case in D. R. Mankad's critical edition of the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*. Supplementary passages are excluded from the main evidence unless their textual status is identified. Verse references follow these editions; translations and paraphrases are the author's unless otherwise stated.

The six cases were purposively selected for maximum variation in developmental age, type of social place, parental authority, and the child's acceptance or rejection of the intervention. They include educational admission, foster-family membership, princely identity, dynastic recognition, royal succession, and the transfer of paternal protection and political patronage in anticipation of loss. The corpus also contains supportive and limiting cases: some interventions prepare, represent, or protect the child, while others reveal the limits of parental power, concealment, or unilateral planning. AsKaṇva acts as guardian and foster-grandparent, and Sugrīva assumes protection of Angada at Vāli's request, the unit of analysis includes parental and parent-like care.

Each case is first interpreted within its own narrative and institutional setting. It is then examined through a common sequence: the place at stake, the form of parental intervention, the *saṃskāras* created or reinforced, the child's later *svānubhava* of recognition or conflict, and the exercise of *kartṛ-bhāva*. Cross-case comparison identifies shared ethical patterns while preserving differences of genre, developmental age, family structure, institutional authority, and political context.

The narratives are treated as ethical, educational, philosophical, and relational reflections rather than as empirical case records or material for psychological diagnosis. Claims about character and motivation are grounded in narrated speech, action, sequence, available alternatives, relationships, and consequences. Where the text does not disclose a character's inner response, the study does not supply one.

Conceptual Framework

Extended *Vātsalya*

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In this study, *vātsalya* refers to parental affection expressed as responsibility for the child's good. Extended *vātsalya* describes intentional parental or parent-like action that reaches beyond domestic care into family membership, education, institutional recognition, public authority, and political life. It may involve truthful preparation, advocacy, role formation, the creation of opportunity, or the preservation of protection and standing during transition. Unlike socialisation, which may occur through the wider environment, extended *vātsalya* concerns deliberate intervention directed towards both the child's social place and the ability to inhabit it responsibly.

"Transitional guardianship" refers to the transfer of protection, guidance, and social support when a parent expects to be unable to continue those responsibilities. It does not imply the replacement of all existing family care.Social placement and social formation are connected but distinct. A parent may secure admission, belonging, legitimacy, succession, recognition, or continued protection without developing the judgment needed to use that position responsibly. Conversely, parents may provide sound ethical formation while lacking the authority to obtain the position the child seeks. The framework therefore evaluates both the place secured and the child's capacity to understand, accept, reject, or reshape it.

The ethical quality of an intervention is assessed through five criteria: truth, proportionality, welfare, agency, and consent. The intervention should rest on an honest account of identity and relationship, suit the child's age and need, serve the child's good, strengthen the capacity to understand and act, and respect considered choice where age, capacity, and opportunity make such choice possible. Where these conditions are absent or the child's response is not narrated, consent is not presumed.

The *Svabhāva-Saṃskāra-Svānubhava* Framework

Svabhāva, formed from *sva* ("one's own") and *bhāva* ("state" or "mode of being"), refers here to the disposition visible in recurrent patterns of thought, feeling, and conduct. It shapes how a person receives guidance and responds to relationships and events. The study does not treat *svabhāva* as fixed or mechanically determinative. The tension between action shaped by disposition and the capacity to deliberate is reflected in *Bhagavad Gītā* 18.60 and 18.63.

Saṃskāra refers here to a lasting formative impression rather than primarily to a rite of passage, although ritual acts may also leave such impressions. Parental speech, affection, discipline, education, expectations, social relationships, and earlier choices may create or reinforce *saṃskāras*. Silence, partiality, indulgence, neglect, and inconsistency may do the same. *Yoga Sūtra* 4.9 provides a primary anchor for the continuity of memory and *saṃskāra*.

Svānubhava means one's lived experience as both event and interpretation. The same circumstance may affect individuals differently because it is received through existing *svabhāva* and earlier *saṃskāras*. The term is used here as an analytical category rather than as a single theory explicitly stated in every narrative.

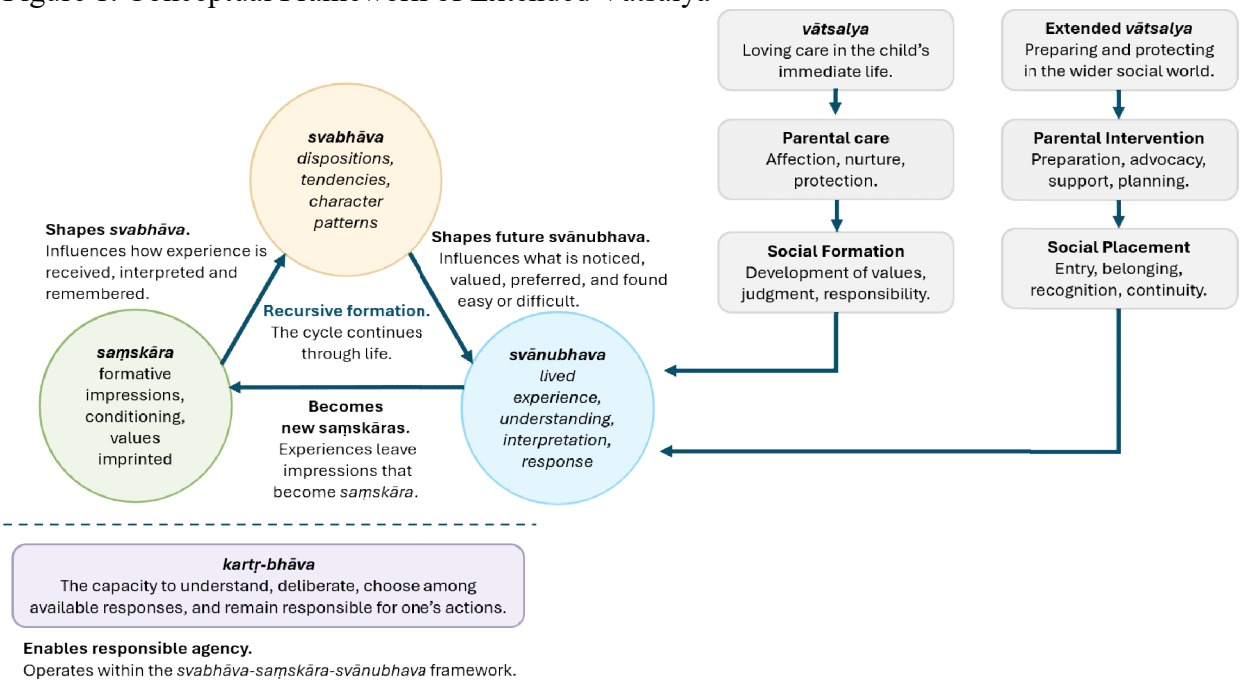
Kartṛ-bhāva

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Kartṛ-bhāva, formed from *kartṛ* ("doer" or "agent") and *bhāva* ("state" or "capacity"), refers to the ability to understand a situation, choose from available responses, and remain responsible for one's conduct. Disposition, formative impressions, relationships, and circumstances may shape desire and judgment, but they do not eliminate moral agency. (*Bhagavad Gītā* 18.63), which places deliberation before action, provides a primary anchor for this use.

The framework is recursive. Parental and social influences are the child's *svānubhava* thatform*saṃskāras* that form*svabhāva* that is the lens through which later *svānubhava* are perceived. Repeated experiences may reinforce, challenge, or redirect these impressions and contribute to patterns of *svabhāva*. The sequence of desire, resolve, action, and becoming (*BṛhadāraṇyakaUpaniṣad* 4.4.5) supports this account of formation through repeated orientation and conduct.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Extended Vatsalya



Analysis

Jabālā and Satyakāma: Truthful Preparation for Educational Belonging

Satyakāma told his mother Jabālā that he wished to live with a teacher as a *brahmacārin* and asked for his *gotra* (*ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* 4.4.1). Jabālā could not name his lineage. She stated what she knew, gave him her name, and instructed him to identify himself as SatyakāmaJābāla (*ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* 4.4.2). Her response gave him a truthful account that he could carry into a public encounter.

When Gautama asked about his lineage, Satyakāma repeated Jabālā's words (*ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* 4.4.4). Gautama accepted him because his speech showed fidelity to truth and initiated him as a student (*ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* 4.4.5). Satyakāma later completed

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demanding discipline and appeared as the teacher of Upakosala (*ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* 4.5-10). The narrative thus presents uncertain lineage as compatible with educational authority.

Jabālā prepared Satyakāma to speak for himself. She neither fabricated status nor replaced his voice before the teacher. The case gives the clearest support to the hypothesis because truthful and proportionate care strengthened admission, formation, and agency.

Adhiratha, Rādhā, and Karṇa: Complete Belonging and Limited Social Authority

Adhiratha found the abandoned Karṇa, brought him home, and accepted him as a son. Rādhā nursed and raised him. Adhiratha performed his rites, named him Vasuṣeṇa, and arranged his marriages (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.139.5-11). These actions gave Karṇa full family membership and lasting *saṃskāras* of filial loyalty and obligation.

Karṇa's search for advanced martial knowledge also revealed his own agency. He approached Paraśurāma claiming to share his teacher's lineage and was accepted (*Mahābhārata* CE 12.2.15-16). When the deception was exposed, Karṇa acknowledged that he was a charioteer's son (*Mahābhārata* CE 12.3.25-30). The episode separates the truthful belonging given by Adhiratha and Rādhā from Karṇa's later choices in pursuing recognition.

Karṇa's ambition and sensitivity to honour drew him towards martial distinction and Duryodhana's public recognition (*Mahābhārata* CE 1.126.1-39). When Kṛṣṇa disclosed his birth and offered him royal primacy, Karṇa refused (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.138.9-28). He explained his obligations to Adhiratha, Rādhā, his own family, and Duryodhana (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.139.5-17), even though he foresaw the likely defeat and destruction of Duryodhana's side (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.141.2-6).

Adhiratha and Rādhā gave Karṇa every form of family support within their power, but they could not confer the martial and political rank he later sought. The case shows that sound parental care may create secure belonging without satisfying every aspiration. Karṇa's attachment to his foster parents reflected their formation; his continued alliance with Duryodhana remained his own moral choice.

Drupada and His Queen with Śikhaṇḍin: Protected Role and Parental Projection

Drupada sought a child who would confront Bhīṣma, and Śiva foretold that a daughter would later become male. At the child's birth, the queen announced a son. Drupada performed the rites, concealed the circumstances of birth, and arranged royal and martial training (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.189.3-17; 5.190.1). Śikhaṇḍin grew within a princely role shaped by protection, prophecy, and dynastic purpose.

Marriage exposed the vulnerability of that arrangement. When the bride's family threatened Drupada, Śikhaṇḍin treated the danger as a personal responsibility and left for the forest. The exchange with the YakṣaSthūṇākarṇa enabled his return and resolved the immediate crisis (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.191-93). Bhīṣma later refused to fight him because he had previously been

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female, and Śikhaṇḍin's presence became decisive in Bhīṣma's fall (*Mahābhārata* CE 5.193.61-64).

Parental protection gave Śikhaṇḍin education and opportunity, while concealment transferred future risk to the child and tied the role to an inherited conflict. The case qualifies the hypothesis because care lost ethical clarity when the child's interest became inseparable from dynastic purpose.

Śakuntalā, Kaṇva, and Bharata, Son of Duṣyanta: Formation and Age-Appropriate Advocacy

Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta entered a *gāndharva* marriage on the condition that their son would inherit the throne (*Mahābhārata* CE 1.67.15-20). Śakuntalā had been raised in Kaṇva's*āśrama*. After the child's birth, Kaṇva performed his rites, and the community recognised him as Sarvadamana (1.68.1-8). When the child had reached the stage appropriate for royal recognition, Kaṇva sent Śakuntalā and her son to Duṣyanta with disciples (1.68.9-14). His guardianship prepared the transition rather than preventing it.

Śakuntalā asked Duṣyanta to recognise the marriage and install their son as heir (*Mahābhārata* CE 1.68.15-17). When the king denied the relationship, she argued from truth, paternity, paternal duty, and succession. She finally asked him to accept the child even if he rejected her (*Mahābhārata* CE 1.68.69-71). A celestial declaration confirmed the relationship, after which Duṣyanta publicly acknowledged Śakuntalā and her child later known as Bharata (*Mahābhārata* CE 1.69.28-44).

Śakuntalā's son's response to the court confrontation was not narrated, and he was too young to carry the claim himself. Kaṇva prepared the transition, while Śakuntalā represented the child's legitimate interests. The case supports the hypothesis through advocacy that matched age and dependence while opening space for later agency.

Kaikeyī and Bharata, Son of Daśaratha: Succession Planning Rejected by the Adult Child

Mantharā's counsel aroused Kaikeyī's fear about Rāma's succession, but Kaikeyī adopted the plan and chose to invoke Daśaratha's two promised boons (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 2.7-9). She demanded Bharata's installation and fourteen years of exile for Rāma. She later told Bharata what she had obtained for him and urged him to accept coronation (2.72.49-54). Rāma's later recollection of Daśaratha's promise to Kaikeyī's father placed the dispute within a wider dynastic context (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 2.107.3-7), but Bharata had neither requested the throne nor authorised his mother's action.

Bharata rejected the position prepared for him. In the royal assembly, he declared that the kingdom belonged to Rāma, repudiated Kaikeyī's act, and resolved to bring Rāma back (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 2.82.11-16). When Rāma upheld Daśaratha's command, Bharata installed Rāma's sandals as the symbol of royal authority and administered the kingdom as a trust rather than claim kingship as his own (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 2.115.15-27).

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Kaikeyī obtained Daśaratha's order for Bharata's installation but she had not thought that Bharata would refuse. The case sharpens the hypothesis by showing that parental intervention may obtain a social position while failing to serve the adult child's chosen good. Her plan failed the tests of welfare, consent, and agency because it substituted political design for Bharata's moral judgment.

Vāli and Aṅgada: Transitional Guardianship and the Preservation of Social Place

Vāli's final provision for Aṅgada presents transitional guardianship as another form of extended *vātsalya*. Knowing that he could no longer remain present, Vāli asked Sugrīva to care for Aṅgada as his own son and assume paternal responsibility as provider, protector, and source of security (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 4.22.8-10). He also described the young prince's capacity for public service and anticipated a place for him in Sugrīva's advance guard (4.22.11-12). TārāwasAṅgada's mother and would still be around to take care of him and to guide him.Vāli entrusted paternal protection and political patronage to Sugrīva rather than replacing her care.

Vāli then instructed Aṅgada to recognise the changed political order, endure pleasure and hardship, practise self-restraint, and serve under Sugrīva without either excessive intimacy or hostility (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 4.22.20-23). He asked for protection and guidance rather than immediate kingship, accepted Sugrīva's authority, and sought continuity of belonging for his son. Aṅgada later received public recognition as *yuvarāja* (*VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa* CE 4.26.12b-13).

The episode shows that placing a child in the world may include preserving an existing social place when a parent anticipates the end of his protection. Vāli's intervention matched Aṅgada's vulnerability, entrusted paternal support to an available guardian, and prepared the young prince to act responsibly within a political order he had not chosen. The prudence of this final provision does not resolve the ethical questions raised by Vāli's earlier conflict with Sugrīva. Aṅgada's immediate response to the transfer is not narrated, so the case supports proportional guardianship more clearly than consent.

Comparative Analysis

A Typology of Extended Vātsalya

A comparison of the six narratives produces a six-part typology of parental and parent-like intervention. The categories are distinguished by the task undertaken in relation to the child's place in the wider world. Truthful preparation equips the child to seek entry into an institution through honest self-representation. Secure family incorporation creates lasting family membership. Protected role formation prepares and protects the child within an assigned social or political identity. Representative advocacy advances a claim that a minor or dependent child cannot yet present independently. Succession planning attempts to secure an adult child's future political position. Transitional guardianship transfers protection, guidance, and public support when a parent anticipates being unable to continue those responsibilities.

These categories describe forms of intervention. A particular form of intervention is not ethically sound simply because it is motivated by parental affection or because it succeeds in obtaining a

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desired position. Its ethical quality depends on the criteria of truth, proportionality, welfare, consent, and agency established above.

The typology becomes an explanatory model when each intervention is examined through four connected elements: the social place at stake, the caregiver's action, the ethical conditions governing that action, and the child's response.

Extended vātsalya begins when a parent recognises or anticipates a problem concerning the child's belonging, admission, recognition, role, succession, or continued protection. The parent then acts within the limits of available knowledge and authority. That intervention creates conditions that may support or hinder the child's formation. Through kartṛ-bhāva, the child may accept, reject, reinterpret, or reshape the place prepared for them.

Table 1. Modes of Parental Intervention

Mode of intervention	Social place at stake	Parental task	Ethical issue revealed	Child's response or outcome
Truthful preparation	Educational admission	Give the child a truthful account with which to represent himself	Whether uncertain lineage must be concealed to obtain admission	Satyakāma repeats Jabālā's account and is admitted
Secure family incorporation	Family membership and later public recognition	Create complete belonging through care, rites, naming, and family life	The limits of parental power over status outside the family	Karṇa retains filial loyalty but pursues recognition through his own choices
Protected role formation	Princely identity and education	Preserve a role through concealment, training, and political preparation	Whether protection exposes the child to later risk or parental purpose	Śikhaṇḍin assumes responsibility when the concealed identity creates conflict
Representative advocacy	Dynastic legitimacy and succession	Present the minor child's claim before public authority	When speaking for the child is proportionate to age and dependence	The child receives recognition through adult advocacy
Succession planning	Kingship	Use political influence to influence an adult son's advancement	Whether parental planning overrides adult consent and judgment	Bharata rejects the throne

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Transitional guardianship	Continued protection and political belonging	Transfer paternal protection and prepare the child for changed authority	Whether continuity can be preserved without determining the child's future	Aṅgada remains protected and later becomes *yuvarāja*

The six cases show that extended vātsalya may prepare, incorporate, protect, advocate, plan, or transfer guardianship. These interventions differ in ethical quality according to whether they rest on truth, respond to the child's age and need, act in the child's best interests, and respect developing agency.

The Karṇa–Bharata contrast reveals two opposing failures of alignment between parental action and social placement. Adhiratha and Rādhā gave Karṇa everything within their social power, yet his aspirations extended beyond what they could provide. Kaikeyī possessed the influence to obtain an order of succession, but Bharata rejected it. The contrast shows that neither effort nor authority is ethically sufficient unless parental action serves the child's welfare and respects the child's judgment.

Truth and Stability

The contrast between Satyakāma and Karṇa is especially clear. Unlike Satyakāma, who entered learning through truthful self-presentation, Karṇa obtained access through a claim that could not be sustained. Truth affected the stability of what was achieved.

Karṇa's place within his foster family survived disclosure of his birth because it rested on sustained care rather than an invented claim. Śikhaṇḍin's princely role created immediate opportunity, but concealment later exposed the family to political danger. Across these cases, social placement proved more stable when its supporting account could withstand public scrutiny.

Proportionality and Consent

Parental intervention must match the child's age, dependence, and capacity. Śakuntalā spoke for her minor son because he was too young to establish his dynastic claim. Vāli sought continued protection for Aṅgada because his death would leave the young prince vulnerable in a changed political order. Kaikeyī, by contrast, acted for Bharata, son of Daśaratha, even though he was capable of moral and political judgment. His rejection of the succession shows that advocacy appropriate during dependence becomes intrusive when it replaces the considered choice of an adult child.

Welfare and Parental Purpose

A position obtained for a child does not necessarily serve the child's interests. Kaikeyī obtained political advantage for Bharata, but the throne conflicted with his values and loyalty to Rāma. Adhiratha and Rādhā met Karṇa's need for family membership, although they could not satisfy

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his later desire for wider recognition. Drupada's protection gave Śikhaṇḍin education and status, while tying his future to a dynastic grievance.

Vāli's final appeal provides a contrasting model. It sought Aṅgada's security within Sugrīva's rule rather than immediate succession. Vāli accepted Sugrīva's authority and sought protection, guidance, and continuity for his son. Parental care serves the child's good when the place offered answers a genuine need rather than primarily advancing the parent's purpose.

Agency

Parental support strengthens agency when it increases the child's ability to understand and act. Jabālā enabled Satyakāma to represent himself. Kaṇva prepared Śakuntalāson for transition, and Śakuntalā carried his claim during childhood. Adhiratha and Rādhā gave Karṇa a secure family base from which he later made independent choices.

Vāli's counsel prepared Aṅgada to act within circumstances that neither father nor son had chosen. He advised him to recognise Sugrīva's authority, practise restraint, and avoid both excessive intimacy and hostility. By contrast, Drupada shaped Śikhaṇḍin's role around a purpose fixed before mature choice, while Kaikeyī attempted to determine Bharata's political future despite his capacity to decide.

Belonging, Recognition, and Parental Power

The cases distinguish secure belonging from public recognition. Karṇa possessed full family membership without receiving the wider status he desired. Śakuntalā'sson belonged within Kaṇva's*āśrama* before receiving royal acknowledgment. Satyakāma possessed a truthful identity but still depended on Gautama's decision for admission. Aṅgada belonged to Vāli's family and royal lineage, but his place within the new political order required Sugrīva's protection and public acceptance.

Parents and guardians can prepare, incorporate, protect, or present the child, while recognition remains partly dependent on teachers, rulers, and social authorities. Aṅgada's later installation as *yuvarāja* gave political effect to the continuity Vāli had sought for him.

Greater parental authority does not guarantee control over the outcome. Drupada could educate Śikhaṇḍin as a prince but he could not make the role uncontested across kingdoms. Kaṇva and Śakuntalā could present her son's claim but still required Duṣyanta's public acknowledgment. Kaikeyī could invoke Daśaratha's promises but could not compel Bharata to accept the throne. Vāli could request protection for Aṅgada but could not personally ensure the boy's future after his death. Parental responsibility must be judged by the quality of the intervention rather than control over every result.

Character Formation and Personal Responsibility

The cases also show why parental action did not produce uniform responses. Satyakāma's disposition towards truth made Jabālā's preparation effective. Karṇa's ambition and sensitivity to honour drew him towards recognition beyond his foster parents' reach. Śikhaṇḍin's persistence

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developed within a role shaped by secrecy and dynastic expectation. Śakuntalā'sson depended on adult representation during childhood, while Bharata, son of Daśaratha, used independent judgment to reject Kaikeyī's plan. Vāli's final counsel sought to prepare Aṅgada to respond to political loss through restraint, loyalty, and adaptation.

Parental actions left lasting *saṃskāras*, while later *svānubhava* confirmed, challenged, or redirected their meaning. Truth became a resource for admission, family care became a source of loyalty, concealed birth moved from protection to crisis, advocacy enlarged a child's social future, transitional guardianship preserved continuity across anticipated paternal loss, and rejected succession exposed the limits of parental planning. These patterns show how formation influences conduct without determining it. The analysis preserves *kartṛ-bhāva* by holding mature characters responsible for choices made within inherited conditions.

Evaluation of the Hypothesis

The six cases substantially support the hypothesis while identifying its limits. Jabālā-Satyakāma shows the strongest alignment of truth, proportion, welfare, and agency. Adhiratha-Rādhā-Karṇa confirms the formative value of secure belonging while exposing the limits of parental power over public rank and later aspiration. Drupada-Śikhaṇḍin qualifies the hypothesis because protection depended on concealment and dynastic purpose. Śakuntalā, Kaṇva, and Bharata, son of Duṣyanta, support direct advocacy when childhood prevents effective self-representation. Kaikeyī-Bharata, son of Daśaratha, shows that parental planning becomes ethically unsound when it overrides an adult child's considered judgment. Vāli-Aṅgada supports the hypothesis through a proportionate transfer of paternal protection that preserved welfare and prepared adaptation without demanding immediate succession.

The comparison confirms that social placement and social formation may support one another, but they may also diverge. A beneficial social position does not automatically produce responsible formation, just as sound formation does not guarantee access to the position a child seeks. Such placement supports responsible formation only when parental action rests on truth, matches age and need, serves the child's interests, respects consent where independent choice is possible, and leaves room for *kartṛ-bhāva*. The Karṇa-Bharata contrast discussed above demonstrates this divergence particularly clearly.

Extended *vātsalya* thus strengthens social formation when it supports the child's responsible participation in that place truthfully, willingly, and responsibly. Parents shape access and opportunity, while *saṃskāra*, *svānubhava*, *svabhāva*, counsel, and *kartṛ-bhāva* explain how the child receives, interprets, and responds to those formative conditions.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The study examines a small, purposively selected corpus and does not represent the full range of parenting traditions in Indian Knowledge Systems. The selected narratives are drawn primarily from a limited selection of major Sanskrit sources and therefore do not represent the full range of regional, vernacular, and later Indian narrative traditions. Future research may test and extend the model through narratives from the Purāṇas, classical Sanskrit literature, regional literature, and

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other Indian textual traditions.The sources also differ in form and purpose. The Satyakāma account in the *ChāndogyaUpaniṣad* is brief and philosophical, while the epic narratives develop through longer familial and political conflicts. The comparison identifies shared patterns without treating these texts as identical.

The terms *svabhāva*, *saṃskāra*, *svānubhava*, and *kartṛ-bhāva* form an interpretive framework rather than a single theory explicitly stated in every narrative. Claims about character and motivation are based on speech, action, context, available choices, and consequences. Where the text does not reveal a character's response, as in the case of Bharata, son of Duṣyanta, at the royal court, or Aṅgada's immediate response to Vāli's final provision, the study does not infer it. The Vāli–Aṅgada analysis is limited to the transfer of paternal protection, Aṅgada's immediate political transition, and his installation as *yuvarāja*; it does not trace Aṅgada's full later career.

The study is limited to textual and philosophical analysis. It does not offer direct guidance for contemporary parenting, adoption, education, gender identity, or institutional access. Applying its findings to present-day contexts would require further conceptual clarification and empirical research.

Conclusion

Extended *vātsalya* describes the parental and parent-like work of helping a child enter, retain, or renegotiate a place in social, educational, political and institutional settings. The six-part typology explains how extended *vātsalya* operates through different forms of preparation, incorporation, protection, representation, planning, and transfer, while the ethical criteria explain why similar parental intentions can produce very different relationships between social placement and social formation.Its ethical value lies in the alignment between social placement and responsible formation: the place secured or preserved should rest on truth, serve the child's interests, match age and capacity, respect consent where choice is possible, and support growing agency.

The *svabhāva–saṃskāra–svānubhava* framework explains how parental influence enters the child's developing patterns of experience and conduct, while *kartṛ-bhāva* preserves responsibility when independent judgment becomes possible.

Extended *vātsalya* aligned with *dharma* prepares without fabrication, protects without subordinating the child's welfare to parental ambition, advocates during dependence, transfers responsibility when parental presence is ending, and respects considered choice when agency has matured. The study therefore proposes extended *vātsalya* as a distinct ethical framework within Indian Knowledge Systems for understanding how parental and parent-like care shapes a child's entry into, participation in, and response to the wider social world. By connecting social placement with ethical formation and responsible agency, the framework offers a conceptual basis for further comparative study across Indian narrative traditions.

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