

Consumption as *Dharma*: Govardhanram Tripathi and the Dissolution of the Self

I “I wish to produce, or see produced, not this or that event – but a people who shall be higher and stronger than they are, who shall be better able to look and manage for themselves than is the present *helpless* generation of my educated and uneducated countrymen. What kind of a nation that should be and how that spark should be kindled for the organic flame: these were, and are, the problems before my mind. I lay down this as, for the present, the only one fixed objective before me...”¹

With these words Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi (1855-1907) articulates his *svadharma*. The attempt here is to understand Govardhanram’s project of tempering the minds and souls of his countrymen. This is sought to be achieved by a simultaneous reading of his novel *Sarasvatichandra*², his notes to himself, *Scrap Books*³ and the biography of his daughter *Lilavati Jivankala*.⁴

Govardhanram was born on 20th October, 1855, in a vадnagara nagar brahmin family at Nadiad.⁵ This *vaishnav* family had no remarkable tradition of learning. For atleast three generations this family practised money lending. Govardhanram spent his formative years in Mumbai and Nadiad. He acquired primary education in the Buddhivardhak Gujarati shala in Mumbai and Government English school at Nadiad. In 1871 Govardhanram passed his matriculation examination as a student of Elphinstone School.

Govardhanram joined the Elphinstone College for his B.A. Between 1871 and 1875 he studied History, Economics, Nyaya and Nitishastra. He passed his B.A. examination at the second attempt at the age of twenty.



After passing his B.A., Govardhanram made three resolutions which governed his entire life. He resolved to acquire a law degree, to start an independent legal practice and to give up legal practice at the age of forty to dedicate the rest of his life to the service of the people through literature.⁶

In 1876 he passed his first LL.B. examination. He was forced by circumstances to accept the post of a personal secretary to Samaldas Parmadddas, the *Devan* of Bhavnagar state. This gave him the opportunity to observe and participate, in close proximity, the functioning of a native state. He had hoped that the stay at Bhavnagar would be short, only a minor aberration in his plan. He was repeatedly frustrated in his attempts to pass the LL.B. examination. He failed three times and eventually passed it in 1883 at the fourth attempt. He immediately left Bhavnagar for Mumbai, where at the age of twenty-nine he started his independent legal practice. His practice at the Bombay High Court flourished. At the height of his legal career, he fulfilled his long cherished dream. At the age of forty-two he retired from the practice to contemplate the state of his people and society in the quiet solitude of his ancestral house in Nadiad.

For Govardhanram, the original cause of the universe lies in what he describes as the Great Will or the Great Force. Individual beings are a mere point, a manifestation of the Great Will. "Our will is a manifestation, at a point, of his will. His will is universal, ours is a point of it." The ontological vocation of human beings is to understand the Great Will and function in harmony with it. "We are unable to enter into the actual motives of the Great Will, but we can understand and join its music and poetry... Our final cause – like all final causes – is to understand our proper function in this symphony and join it properly."⁸

A perfect conscience, according to Govardhanram, recognises that "I is a fiction,"⁹ and it is at this moment of recognition of self-identity that the individual being is in perfect harmony and union with the Great Will. In this union and realisation of identity lies salvation. But how is this salvation to be

attained? The central question for Govardhanram is, how can an individual reconcile his vocation of final union with the Great Force, and his obligation towards his family, the society and the country? For Govardhanram, the final union and duties towards the society can be attained only through what he describes as a philosophy of consumption. "Total sacrifice of the individual for the good of the whole is consumption... Complete dissolution and sacrifice of the self for others is consumption. It is through consumption that individual existence and life achieve completion."¹⁰ Consumption for Govardhanram is an all encompassing philosophy and praxis. It is by leading a life of consumption that an individual offers his body/soul to the *Yajna* of the Great Force. "We must consume, both body and soul,... in the Great and Patent *Yajna* that is blazing around us, we throw as *Havis* (Oblation) the patent *Yajna* of body and soul..."¹¹

The philosophy of consumption becomes the sole mediator between the individual and the Great Will and also the individual and the society. Through the philosophy of consumption, Govardhanram attempts to offer a critique of the vedantist philosophy, which was one of the earliest and most powerful influences on him. Vedanta, Govardhanram believes leads to asceticism as the mode of attaining salvation. "Patent is a thing to be avoided, and latent to be sought... as to the censures passed against the Patent, as to the exclusive acceptance of the Latent as Transcendental Idea"¹²

In 1877, at the age of twenty-two Govardhanram, in an essay entitled "Practical Asceticism in my sense of the word" offered a powerful critique of the practice of renunciation as a mode of attaining salvation. The care for the "self" is at the centre, he observes, in the practice renunciation. Salvation cannot be attained through a self-centred mode. "The Great Bacon has said," he wrote, "it is a poor centre of man's action, himself, and it is true. But I go some steps beyond him. I say it is poisonous centre of man's action himself."¹³ Asceticism for Govardhanram is an act of rebellion against the Great Will. It is as unjustified as suicide. A real ascetic hands over the care of the "self" to the Great Will and consumes it for the society. "Asceticism in its usual sense, is a

mistake and a substitution of miscarriage for consumption. Asceticism in its real sense, is most beautiful consumption.”¹⁴

Consumption of an individual is conditioned by the capacities of the person. “Consumption... is not a promiscuous or unlimited duty. It is actually limited, and potentially unlimited, that it may be enlarged according to capacity.”¹⁵

Notions of morality, ethics and justice are also contingent upon the idea of consumption. Defining vice and virtue, he wrote:

“Whatever makes a man feed on the flesh of the world, is ordinarily vice. Whatever is his consumption in order to feed the world, is a virtue. Whatever is inconsistent with such consumption and means of attaining of it is vice. Whatever is consistent with it, is innocent. Whatever furthers it is virtue. Whenever feeding oneself is instrumental to such consumption, it is virtue.”¹⁶

For Govardhanram, poetry and philosophy, ethics and religion must converge in any philosophical system. He is aware that in the philosophy of consumption he has created an all encompassing world-view, a mode of life, his *svadharma*.

“To my mind... Poetry and Philosophy, Ethics and Religion, must eventually converge, and in Ethics, I include the world in all its aspects. Need I say that my vision of Philosophy of Consumption, with all its imperfections, reaches this very point?”¹⁷

A person who recognises virtue and vice, adopts the former and shuns the latter has a sense of duty. Thus for Govardhanram consumption is not only a virtue but it is *Dharma*.

This conception of *Dharma* informed his vocation and defined his understanding of personal duty towards the country.

While clarifying for himself “Duties in regard to the country,” that Govardhanram set before himself the goal of moulding a generation of people who shall be “higher and stronger” and “better able to manage for themselves.”

In this clear articulation of *Svadharmā*, Govardhanram is denying the relevance and the efficacy of *events*. Events for him are all acts uniformed by deep industry and knowledge.

Aware as he was of “the evil consequences which we may inflict on our country by our well meaning follies,” he decided to “attempt or wish to assist nothing,” before proper study. Because, “without study there is no sight and without sight no efficacy of action.”¹⁸ In order to attain the requisite clarity to play out his conflicting, contradictory emotions, desires, feelings, and ideas Govardhanram regularly maintained his personal diaries – the *Scrap Books*. Readers of his *Scrap Books* cannot but be affected by Govardhanram’s constant struggle and deep agony to attain the state of *aptavachana* – a person who has a vision of life and society and wished to conduct his life accordingly.

It was also not his aspiration to produce an event – which for him was a mere reflection of deeper civilisational processes. “To produce a particular event, be it a political constitutional agitation or a social reform effervescence – this is too little for my mind and aspiration.”¹⁹

This sense of duty was also conditioned by awareness of his capabilities as “there is no duty beyond capacities.” He was aware that it was not given to him to be a ‘public’ person – which he will be forced to be if he wanted to produce an event – he wanted to cultivate the *Saksibhav* of a *Sthitapragna*. “Glory, Public applause, Eminence, Moneys, Public Leadership, etc., are *Things I do not want at all*.”²⁰

He desired to achieve the state of *sthitapragna*, and his disinclination to produce an event should not lead us to conclude that Govardhanram is advocating either *nivṛtti* or a form of asceticism. Asceticism for him is an act

of rebellion against the Great Will. The state of *sthitapragna* does not entail denial of duties. A *sthitapragna* is not a person who is dislocated from the world, on the contrary, he is a person who experiences deeply the world around him, but at the same time does not give himself to the rule of the senses. Govardhanram would say that all acts of a *sthitapragna* are acts of consumption. He describes this state of being as a state of Practical Asceticism.

He was aware that his goal of moulding a generation of people who shall be “higher and stronger” and who shall be “able to manage for themselves” and the act of “kindling the spark of the organic flame” – which will bring about long lasting mediation in the forces shaping the destiny of his nation – was not a task given to mere mortals. He, at times is plagued by deep doubts self worth. He says “I am a pigmy and the pigmiest of pigmies... I may never be able to attempt so much as a beginning in the right direction for the simple reason that abilities may be extinct ashes...”²¹, as he is aware that life of the country is much longer than that of an individual.

Neither the magnitude of the task nor such daunting realisations deviate him from his self-chosen path. “I must fancy”, he says “that I am an *Ayaramar*, when planning my duty to my country.”²²

It was as a part of his duty towards the country that Govardhanram embarked upon a project which was to consume him for nearly fifteen years. In 1885, he started writing his novel *Sarasvatichandra*. When the final part was published in 1901, fourteen years had elapsed between the publication of the first and the last part. This book was spread over four parts and ran into over 1700 pages. He did not wish to write the novel at all. His initial plan was to write philosophical essays on the human condition. Upon reflection he found the essay form limiting. This limitation arose from the form, its restricted reach, and the inability of the general reading classes to appreciate and comprehend discursive prose. Given the limiting circumstances he came to the conclusion that illustrations of actual and ideal life is the most appropriate mode of communication. “The conviction has also grown upon him (author)

that reality in flesh and blood under the guise of fiction can supply the ordinary reader with subtler moulds and finer casts for the formation of his inner self, than abstract discussions and that this is especially so with *a people who must be made, and not simply left, to read.*"²³

He selected the novel form not for its aesthetic possibilities but for its potential as a medium of "moulding inner selves" of people. "Both women and the novel desire to be beautiful"; he says, "but fulfillment of this desire must be a means to achieve higher goals. Striving for mere aesthetic pleasure is not only undesirable but also harmful."²⁴

Govardhanram is keenly aware of the functions and possibilities of the novel. He says that this form of literature is unrivalled in its popularity and reach amongst the educated middle-classes. He describes it as a "universal luxury."

He felt disappointed that the possibilities of this form were not being utilised by the authors, that instead they used it as a medium to gratify the instincts of the reading classes. Functions of the novel, he says, are "much higher and sacred." An author who desires to use this form as a means of education must be aware of his audience. Govardhanram takes critical look at his readership and classifies them into three categories. In the first category are the scholars who read novels to acquire a deeper understanding of the human condition. The second class, comprise discerning readers who read the novel with a specific purpose of enriching their inner lives. And the third class is the general readership. This class reads novels either because it entertains them or gratifies some of their instincts. This is the class for Govardhanram that "must be made and not just left to read." Most novels address themselves to this class and there lies the reason for its popularity. According to him, the element of fiction or magic does not constitute the central concern of the novel. The function of the novel is to "educate" and "raise" the reading classes. The novel must show them the path of virtue.

Therefore, the characters and situations depicted in the novel assume centrality. Depiction of ideal types cannot inspire readers to aspire for a higher life. Nor can the depiction of evil alienate masses from it. Therefore, Govardhanram says that his novel will depict humane characters who are constantly striving to raise their condition.

With the progress of his enterprise we sense a satisfaction of accomplishment. “The purpose of the writer is to enable the reader to rise to a stage higher than where he was.. Sarasvatichandra, thus undertaken at this point, *works* without doubt, and people *feel* the book. This is a mere literary work and will work on society.”²⁵

A decade after the publication of the first volume, he notes with satisfaction that “the progress of the reading classes is equal to the aspirations of the writer to interest them in the principal problems of the day.”²⁶

The sense of achievement brought with it a sense of greater responsibilities for Govardhanram who was plagued by the fear of illness, and untimely death. “I think I owe it as a duty to the world that I should finish before dying.”²⁷ India he felt was undergoing a strange transition in all spheres of community and personal life, “these forces have cast a gloomy shadow over our eyes.” Henceforth, his objective will not only be to “raise” readers but “to help his countrymen in groping their way out of the darkness into some kind of light.”²⁸

Govardhanram captures the predicament of his society – both the advocates of change and those who wish to give “eternal rigidity to the present” are uncertain as to how this transition will be harmonised. Will the process which is heterogeneous in its inception result in an inward homogeneity? In this time of transition only one certainty exists, “Indian society must yield to the irresistible process of reciprocal assimilation”²⁹ Can this society find a repose? For Govardhanram, the realm of creative imagination can provide repose in such turbulent times as according to him, the “only place where we

can safely look for a peaceful picture inspite of transient facts is in art and poetry.”³⁰

Henceforth, he resolved that the purpose of the novel would be to work towards a vision of a harmonised future. The narrative which hitherto had been a blend of the actual and the ideal, enters a different phase as “the latter acquire a distinct predominance over the former.” While dealing with the causes of the transition experienced by the Indian society Govardhanram refutes the wide spread belief that India was witnessing a fusion of two different civilisations – The modern West and the East.

The Indian civilisation has passed through many phases in its evolution and what we are witnessing today, he says, is a fusion of three civilisations – the modern West, the modern East and the resurgent traditions of the ancient Indian civilisation. He is confident that this will one day result in “reciprocal assimilation and harmony.” It is the possible visions of that day which is the source of anxiety for Indian people. His endeavour would henceforth be to provide one possible path to this assimilation and, a vision of the future. In this “drama of transition” the intellectuals or what he calls the educated Indians, have a crucial function as they are “directly involved by the actual contact and growing reactions of these civilisations.”³¹ Their role is one of mediation between these civilisational forces and the masses, to bring about the inevitable transition. “It has fallen to the lot of educated classes to serve as organic sheaths and conductors between multiform sets or organisms forming repository of these energies.”³² Although living through ambivalent times, Govardhanram is able to identify the problematic and its possible resolution with rare sensibility and awareness.

The act of writing the novel for Govardhanram is a conscious act of tempering the souls of his countrymen. It is through this act that Govardhanram wishes to fulfill his historical role of an “organic sheath” between the great civilisational forces and the Indian masses.

Sarasvatichandra is not “one” unitary text. The novel was not only published in four parts but was also written in four parts over a period of fifteen years. Each part has a distinct thematic content, has its own cast of characters and has different beginnings and ends. This is not to deny either the aesthetic unity or thematic unity of the novel. But the readings which privileged one story – the story of Kumud, Sarasvatichandra and Kusum – as the principal theme and consider all other themes as unnecessary diversions do not allow the appreciation of the complete text.

The increasing influence of the East India Company in the affairs of the “native states” provides the backdrop for the first part, subtitled *Buddhidhan no Karbhar*. It deals with the sustained efforts of Buddhidhan to assume complete control of the administration of a native state, Suvaranapur.

Govardhanram describes the impoverished beginnings of Buddhidhan, his constant victimisation by Shathrai, the Prime Minister of the state and Buddhidhan’s opportunistic alliance and friendship with Bhupsingh—a relative of the king and a claimant to the throne. Together they seek the support of the British Resident officer of a neighbouring area and with his intervention Bhupsingh is declared the legitimate ruler. With great patience Buddhidhan makes moves to secure the full confidence of the new ruler and to rid Shathrai’s influence over the administration of the state. He triumphs and regains the post of the Prime Minister which his family had traditionally held.

The second part of the novel, *Gunsundarini Kutambjal* deals with the state of a Hindu joint family in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Gunsundari and Vidyachatur were married as children. Vidyachatur was educated in Bombay and was appointed as a teacher in an English school at Ratnanagari. He also obtained the post of the teacher to the young prince, Maniraj of Ratnanagari. Gunsundari had acquired functional literacy, but as her name suggests she was endowed with virtues “natural” to women. Vidyachatur trained and educated his young wife enabling them to indulge in the pleasures of the mind and thereby avoiding the fate of many couples married in childhood.

But just as they start experiencing “conjugal” driven by circumstances, Vidyachatur’s relatives come to live with them as dependents. From being a young, joyous wife Gunsundari had to become a *grihini* and had to manage a household of thirteen to fourteen people, all with different needs and different personalities.

In this part Govardhanram achieves the height of his descriptive powers as a novelist. His minute descriptions of the dynamics of a joint family, his observation of human nature – its strengths and fragilities – his unencumbered prose and his characterisation make this part most endearing to readers. Govardhanram describes with a touch of humour – otherwise, so lacking in his prose – the interpersonal conflicts in the joint family, and pregnant Gunsundari’s struggle to keep the family united and each member content. She and her father-in-law, Manchatu, together succeed in both reforming and rehabilitating all constituent units of the joint family, without breaking the “jointness” of the joint family.

The narrative thus far is a blend of actual and ideal aspects of life. From the third part, the ideal acquires a distinctive predominance over the actual. The contrast between the first and the third part – which describes the state craft in another native state, Ratnanagari – is immediately recognisable.

The third part deals with the attempts of an enlightened ruler along with his feudal chiefs and dedicated advisors to create a responsible polity in times of general decay. Ratnanagari, because of the strength and vision of its rulers had survived the onslaught of British expansion. The state of Ratnanagari was governed by the concern for the welfare of all sections of society.

From state and society Govardhanram moves to *Dharma*. The fourth theme deals with the ideal community of Sundargiri. This community of ascetics leads their life in accordance with the principles of *Dharma*, in perfect harmony with nature and her creator; under the benevolent gaze of Vishnudas. Their strivings were the strivings of a soul wishing to achieve

complete non-duality with the creator. The love story – the story of Kumud, Sarasvatichandra and Kusum – links Govardhanram's reflections on the state, society and *Dharma*. Kumud, the naturally virtuous daughter of Gunsundari and Vidyachatur was engaged at an early age to Sarasvatichandra. Born into great wealth, Sarasvatichandra – as his name suggests was a scholar and a shining star amongst the intellectuals of Bombay. Ascetic by nature and given to deep reflection about the state of his country, he was greatly enamoured by the natural charm and virtues of Kumud and they fall in love with each other before marriage.

But his greedy step mother engineers a misunderstanding between the devoted son and the short sighted father which results in Sarasvatichandra disappearing from the house. In deep pain and agony, Sarasvatichandra renounces not only his family and his wealth but also Kumud. Kumud is disconsolate. He decides to live a life of an "Intellectual Vagabond" travelling to different parts of the country to experience the reality of his countrymen. As an unknown, rootless traveller with an assumed identity, and in desperate search for purpose and peace, Sarasvatichandra reaches Suvarnapur. There he is invited to be the guest of Buddhidhan who turns to him for advice. Kumud's parents by then had married their uncomplaining daughter to Pramaddhan, the unworthy and debauch son of Buddhidhan. Sarasvatichandra carrying the burden of his guilt once again leaves Kumud to her fate but not before Pramaddhan suspects the tenderness of their relationship. Before he can cause greater misery to Kumud Sarasvatichandra disappears and is given up as dead. Through a series of accidents Sarasvatichandra reaches Sundargiri, where he is celebrated as the heir to Vishnudas. Kumud, believed to be drowned in a river also reaches Sundargiri and lives in the care of *Sadhus* as an ascetic. Here their feelings are discovered.

Widowed Kumud – though she is unaware of Pramod's death for long time – and Sarasvatichandra experience deep agony because of their mutual love. Vishnudas asks them to spend five nights together in a cave to contemplate their fate. They experience divine intervention and travel to the

Land of the Enlightened in their dreams. Here they experience a union of their souls. They emerge from the cave, enlightened and pure, having conquered the promptings of their bodies by a superior desire – service of the country.

Sarasvatichandra, in his desire to atone for his sins proposes a marriage to widowed Kumud. But she declines. Kumud insists on Sarasvatichandra marrying her younger sister, Kusum. Sarasvatichandra is duty bound to obey Kumud's decision and the reluctant Kusum is also convinced about the desirability of this alliance. The novel ends with the inauguration of Sarasvatichandra's project for the regeneration of the country, and the suggestion of a new phase in the personal lives of Kusum and Sarasvatichandra.

Given his ambition of creating a generation of people "higher and stronger than they are" through the philosophy of consumption, Govardhanram had to engage himself with the institutional structures of social organisation. Despite his self perceived crucifixion in the family, his *Scrap Books* and the novel reflect a remarkable engagement with the institution of joint family.

Oppressed by the existential reality of the joint family, young Govardhanram while studying for his B.A. at Elphinstone College, in an essay entitled "The state of the Hindu society in the Bombay Presidency," offered to his countrymen the following advice: "The moment you get married, start living separately from your parents..."⁷³

The unambiguous pronouncement gives a misleading impression of finality. He was to return, with embarrassing regularity to the issue of joint family in the *Scrap-Books*, despite his repeated resolves not to "spoil" his notes by discussing the family.

Joint family was not only an oppressive existential reality for him – with an average of fourteen people in the house throughout – but it was also an

important social and cultural institution. As Sudhir Chandra has pointed out “both the existential and the normative aspects of the joint family feature in Govardhanram’s dialogues with himself.”³⁴ His *Scrap-Books* open with the statement on the angelic goodness of his wife Lalita and a severe denouncement of the other members of his family, including the parents. So harsh was his criticism that he felt “frozen” while referring to those notes.³⁵ Tired of playing the role of an impartial judge and arbitrator, Govardhanram decided to formulate a “maxim in domestic management” and vowed to follow it. “While everybody is to have his or her liberties in my family; the liberties of no one are to go to the extent of clipping the necessary liberties and moral rights of other members, including even minors”³⁶

Search for equanimity by formulating guiding principles does not provide any respite from the “conjugal jar.” He is forced once again to examine the relative merits and peculiarities of character of the members of the family. Mother, he says, “is visited with short sighted littleness of mind,”³⁷ while the results of the “patriarchal cares” of father Madhavram “only result in hampering me and the whole family.”³⁸ Their partiality for “Mrs. Brother” (wife of Govardhanram’s brother Narhanram) disturbs Lalita, although she has – largely due to Govardhanram’s training – “conquered her overwhelmingly uncontrolled temper.”³⁹

Govardhanram gives details of frictions within the family and ways in which he tried to resolve them. In an entry titled “Family misunderstandings and the way to remove them” he notes his attempts to be an impartial judge between his wife and mother, Shivkashi. He feels that an ideal situation would be one where they can resolve their conflicts without his mediation. This would require them to be “patient, enduring and forgiving.” Govardhanram has no faith in the abilities of Lalita and Shivkashi given their lack of literacy to resolve their conflicts “intellectually.” “Swallowing and explaining would both be impracticable between such illiterate people.”⁴⁰ Instead, he allowed both mother and wife to complain to him in the absence of each other.

Despite his maxim of allowing each member of the family his/her liberty he feels a compulsion to mediate in their inter-personal relationships, as “illiterate people are sure to tyrannise over each other if left to themselves.”⁴¹ The only way in which a joint family is steered away from becoming a joint-nuisance, lies for Govardhanram in the philosophy of consumption, in “ungrudging and all sided scarcies.”⁴²

Govardhanram was willing to even attempt that if it secured peace and harmony in the family. While matters pertaining to the partition of the family property were being discussed, he proposed that he shall retain nothing of the family property, but it was not accepted. The final arrangement of partition that was worked out came very close to his suggestion. He was aware that to a critic, his attitude would appear “Idiocy and spoilation.” But this deliberate consumption fills him with supreme happiness. “I have begun my consumption *at home* – charity must begin at home. It fulfills my aspiration... to find myself so consumed into the atmosphere that surrounds me.”⁴³

With the partition of the family property, - though the property was partitioned they continued to live in the joint family – Govardhanram came closer to the idea of a nuclear family. The thought of the possibility of his sudden death and inability to provide for his wife and children in such an event fills his heart with gloom. “I am a houseless man, and my wife and children are houseless, and my parents think this is good.”⁴⁴

Though he is able to overcome moments of gloom by his faith in the Great Will and the philosophy of consumption, Lalita’s illness and the possibility of her death, makes him resolve once again not to sit in judgement on family matters. He shall henceforth “form judgement but be silent” and will give full play to the old principle. “I allow you your liberty and I shall have mine.” He decided that he will henceforth allow them to settle their relationships in their own way and let them face the consequences of their follies. Henceforth “my only objects of care are now my children, neither wife, nor parents, nor brother...”⁴⁵

Lalita's exclusion from the "objects of his care" is quite puzzling and unexplained. For quite sometime before this note was made, he was writing with some pride about her virtues and was to write after this observation with great sensitivity about her pain and suffering. With Lalita's illness Govardhanram's identification with his nuclear family became more crystalised. He absolves his conscience from traces of any guilt for having passed a judgement against his parents and others in the family.

"My conscience decides in favour of myself."⁴⁶ For the first time in the *Scrap-Books* he is willing to commit himself against the joint family. "My lessons from all this, as a student of sociology, is conformation of my views against a joint family system..."⁴⁷ He feels that if the joint family system cannot be done away with completely, an attempt should be made to minimise the joint-ness of joint families. "When one son serves in Bombay, the other in Karachi, and the father's home is at Surat. This preserves the nature of the family as a joint insurance and minimizes the jointness in other respects."⁴⁸

Lalita's suffering, her illness and the insensitivity of his family makes Govardhanram very bitter about the nature of patriarchal society. Writing about the status of a daughter-in-law in a joint family he wrote, "It is not the daughter-in-law's maturity but the mother-in-law's death that emancipates the former, probably when she is old, and after all her youthful yearnings and motherly sentiments have been smothered and even violated."⁴⁹

A remark by his cousin-uncle Mansukhram that his opinions on the joint family were biased by his own existential experience and not really based on an impartial study of that institution, forces Govardhanram to re-evaluate his views on the joint family.⁵⁰

Having oscillated between the view on the one hand that joint family was a joint nuisance and on the other that joint family was a joint insurance, he suddenly turns to "the brightest side of the joint family." Joint family is *Protective*.⁵¹ He draws the difference between the Western and Indian forms of

social organisation. He called the former territorialism – “which spends its force in raising up individualism” – and the latter tribalism – which “revels in destroying Individualism.”⁵²

Real strength of tribalism lies in its protectiveness. This system, he says, protects its members “whom it feeds and clothes and even saves from inclemency of all elements outside the hearth.”⁵³ He compares the joint family to an insurance society by citing examples from his own family. At a larger level it was also a question between Western and Indian forms of social organisation. A system “so holy and so invulnerable” has provided “indestructible vitality,” and protection to the “society and even the nation” even since the Aryans came to India. This system, he says, is under scathing attacks from territorial nations. Therefore one “should pause and think a thousand times” before attacking such an institution, which is a superior form of social organisation; which even fulfills and takes further, the aspirations of socialism. “It is *the* point which would solve many an inspiration of socialism.”⁵⁴

“Joint Family... provides the fatherless with fathers, the motherless with mothers, sonless with sons and daughterless with daughters, paupers with maintenance, the homeless with homes, the sick with nurses... socialism never went the length of aspiring to so much.”⁵⁵ Considering the situation of his own family he asks, “Could I have left them cold, myself enjoying the warmth of my means? No, not for the world, so long as I was myself – *a Hindu and not a European.*”⁵⁶

Having established the superiority of the Hindu (Indian) form of social organisation over the European form, he cautions those who are seeking radical reorganisation of society. They can “attempt modifications and reasonable development” even attempt partitioning in a particular family – like his own – but, “so far as the large society and the nation of family goes, offer no quackery of medicine to the ignorant masses that are protected by their own old, nature-selected, instinct moulded ways of living, except by slow and well-judged alteration.”⁵⁷

In this enigmatic note of 25 April, 1894, Govardhanram began with a severe criticism of the patriarchal nature of the joint family and suddenly moved to the consideration of the “brightest side of the joint family.” He is even willing to forget his deep discomfort with members of his family and says that all that suffering was not in vain. It appears that though the existential reality of his own family oppressed him, he accepted the “normative authority of the joint family.”⁵⁸

The final impression left by this note is unmistakably in favour of the joint family. These, in no respect were his last words on the joint family. Despite his resolve not to “spoil” the books by references to the family, during the next twelve years of his life he did return again and again to the joint family.

He grappled with the idea of the joint family with equal gravity in his novel. The deep ambivalence of Govardhanram about the institution of the joint family, ranging from total condemnation to romantic idealisation is played out in the novel. These emotions are played out through two characters, Uddhatlal (as the name suggests his response is marked by impudence) and Chandrakant, a wise friend of Sarasvatichandra.⁵⁹

Uddhatlal adopts the radical, abolitionist, stance which Govardhanram had taken earlier, while Chandrakant provides an impassioned defense of the joint family, almost echoing the note of 25 April, 1894. During the debate they even lapse into English from Gujarati to emphasise their rhetoric. Uddhatlal’s trenchant criticism of the joint family is anchored in the argument that tribal forms of social organisation – which is represented by the joint family – demand sacrifice of the individual aspiration. Furthermore, he argues that no fundamental social reconstruction is possible until the root of the problem – the joint family – is abolished. “Our joint family system has but a blasting influence on the growth of our individuals, on our economical and moral conditions, and even on our national and political growth. It has kept our beings stunted in intelligence and action... And for any reform, woe be unto

every idea of your social or domestic reconstruction or even improvement so long as you have not touched the root of the disease and said: Down with the joint family;...”⁶⁰

Chandrakant’s reply to such severe criticism is more cautious. He argues that there is an element of truth in Uddhatlal’s criticism but the picture that he paints is an incomplete one. In an almost poetic articulation of Govardhanram’s views in the note of 25 April, 1894, he asserts that the European solution to the oppressive tendencies of the family – which results in aggressive individualism – is undesirable. He refers to the aspect of insurance that joint families provide, and at a larger national level he emphasises the need to preserve this ancient institution as it arouses feelings of patriotism.

He articulates the familiar argument, that families have socialist aspirations and that the Hindu ideal is even superior to the Western ideology in so far as it aims to further it “The Hindu ideal is eminently socialist in life and practice... The main feature of our Hindu socialism is that it is *Protective*. It protects the weak, the infants, the women, and the aged from starvation and its consequential crimes... It protects and protects”⁶¹

He also shows an awareness that the joint family system in its pure form cannot survive the aggressive onslaught of individualism. The responsibility of his generation will be to make necessary sacrifices to “secure a combination of the two boons, without their abuses.”⁶² This harmony, he argues cannot be achieved by aggressive, abolitionist stance. The harmonising process may take “atleast one generation” or even more and till then the present generation will have to live in “Poverty, patience, forbearance and even suffering.”⁶³ Thus even Chandrakant’s enthusiastic support of the joint family is tempered and qualified by ambivalence.

To a reader of the novel, this almost unexpected and sudden articulation of these two distinct positions on the joint family may appear unwarranted.

This exchange becomes meaningful only when it is read along with the *Scrap-Books*. The distinct position of Uddhatlal and Chandrakant, when combined, show direct resemblance to the complex, ambivalent attitude of their creator Govardhanram. This was not the only time in the novel that Govardhanram revealed his ambivalent attitude on the joint family. The second part of the novel which is titled *Gunsundarini Kutumbhal*, is a larger and more subtler unfolding of Govardhanram's *Scrap-Books*.

The central character of this part, Gunsundari was married to Vidyachatur when both of them were children. Vidyachatur had acquired formal education in Bombay, while Gunsundari as her name suggests, was "naturally" virtuous and wise. Vidyachatur had "trained" and educated her to enable her to partake his concern and appreciate the wisdom of the printed word. Govardhanram describes the circumstances in which more than fourteen members of Vidyachatur's family came to inhabit the house of Gunsundari and Vidyachatur. He creates a "typical" joint family which consisted Vidyachatur's parents – Manchatur and Dharmalaxmi, his debauched, unemployed brother, his wife, their four children and a daughter-in-law, a sister-in-law widowed in her childhood, a widowed sister and her son, and yet another sister and her daughter whose adventurous but foolish husband had run away from home as he could not honour his debts.

Their coming together in Gunsundari and Vidyachatur's house not only placed a heavy burden on the economy of the household but also put a sudden end to the joyous celebration of their sensuous and intellectual "conjugal love." Henceforth, Gunsundari's only aspiration was to keep the family contented and united. As an embodiment of the philosophy of consumption she willingly made all sacrifices and deprived herself of all pleasures and desires. She brought together different individuals, with disparate needs and peculiar characters into a cohesive unit. In spite of her consumption, her efforts were neither appreciated nor recognised by others, preoccupied as they were in furthering their own, narrow self-interests.

Govardhanram describes with a touch of humour, the prevalence of anarchy in the family during the period of Gunsundari's confinement after the birth of her daughter, Kumud. During this period of confinement – Gunsundari, - like her creator Govardhanram – evaluated the characters of those who surrounded her. She was forced to confront the oppressive reality of the joint family. “Oh God! Teach me to remain afloat in this ocean. I used to think that many people staying together is a boon. This is not a boon, it is a curse. Each one has different desires, different peculiarities - each one with a different fault – and if, one cannot bear with it, all the blame is mine, irrespective of my love for them I have to care for all their desires, no one to care for mine..”⁶⁴

Despite this indictment of the joint family, she is not willing to entertain the idea of absolving herself from her duties. It is the old patriarch, Manchatur, who in his empathy for his daughter-in-law, realised that until Gunsundari and Vidyachatur are relieved of the burden of the joint family, they will not be able to enjoy their youth, and the others will never learn to manage for themselves. With Gunsundari and Vidyachatur's help Manchatur relocates all the members.

Their solution to the problem of the joint-family is what Govardhanram had suggested in his *Scrap-Books*; minimise the jointness of the joint family without destroying the joint insurance and protection it provides.

Even in the story of Gunsundari which is otherwise perceived in Gujarati literature as a celebration of Hindu joint-family Govardhanram's ambivalent attitude towards the joint family is quite evident.

As Sudhu Chandra has observed, it is futile to search for the real and definite position of Govardhanram on the issue of the joint family. The entire spectrum of responses – from condemnation to idealisation – is indicative of Govardhanram's attitude on the joint family.⁶⁵

Though it may not be possible to attribute a final position to Govardhanram, it is possible to discern a dominant position. Govardhanram found the reality of his joint family oppressive and found people around him undeserving of his presence. This is quite evident from his chronic lamentations against his family which mark his *Scrap-Books*. Though he found it necessary to address the civilisational issue, while discussing the joint family, his dissatisfaction with his own family, and the nuanced position he adopted in the novel are suggestive of the deep discomfort with the normative aspects of the joint family as well.

Those who came of age in late nineteenth century India and felt concerned about the state of their society and nation, the fact of British presence in India was a fundamental awareness that they had to deal with. Awareness of subjection coupled with a profound uncertainty about the present and the future shaped their response to the British presence in India. Given this ultimate objective – “one which never ought to be lost sight of” – of moulding his people into a great people who would be able to take care of themselves, Govardhanram grappled with the meaning of British rule. In an entry in his diary, *Scrap-Book*, dated 13th April 1891 he wrote:

“India is invaded and subdued already. There is no question of Offensive or Defensive here, and Elasticity would be a nice helpmate in Constitutional Warfare. The rulers are a clever set of people – an admixture of selfish aggressors and disinterested, benevolent helpmates India is worked by ‘push and pull’ among these, and naturally the Home Interest generally carry the day. Yet even here we win morsel by morsel, though often it is snatched away – sometimes even from near the lips.”⁶⁶ The only unambiguous, unqualified statement here is the fact of India’s subjection. Accepting the British presence as given, Govardhanram advises his people to cultivate elasticity. “Coming after offense and defense have been ruled out, ‘elasticity’ becomes the very epitome of ambiguity. The term here seems to suggest pragmatism.”⁶⁷ The relations between the rulers and the ruled are mediated by the idea of warfare. But this is not an offensive, nor a confrontation. The concept of “constitutional” – a

concept given by the colonial rulers – and the need to cultivate elasticity, introduces an element of caution, of pragmatic moderation.

From there Govardhanram moves on to a depiction of rulers. They are “clever”, “selfish aggressors”, “disinterested” and yet “benevolent helpmates.” Here again, Govardhanram displays ambiguous feelings and a mixed assessment of British presence. Yet he is aware that in the ultimate analysis the home interests carries the day and whatever ground is gained by Indians through their elasticity is suddenly snatched away.

Govardhanram might have been ambivalent towards the impact of British presence but he displays remarkable consistency in his analysis of “native states” and the capacity of his people to effectively counter the colonial aggressor. He has no faith in the ability of his countrymen to take premeditated action. They appear to him to be indulging in “well-meaning follies.” He has some faith in the Congress because of its “well chosen leadership” of Hume and Wedderburn. “But in other matters our leaders are unfit. In view of these things, I would like to leave many things to our rulers rather than to our native leaders, for the former are atleast most sensible people. If natives act, I shall not hinder them. If Europeans act I shall have some confidence.”⁶⁸ The high standards he had set for himself in private and public conduct may have made him sceptical of the abilities of his people.

This severe denouncement and total lack of confidence in the abilities of his countrymen informed his vocation of creating a generation which shall be “better able to look and manage for themselves.”

This negative assessment of his countrymen to manage the political and social implications of colonial encounter pervades all his reflections – whether in the *Scarp Books* or the novel. On the question of British presence, he did not allow any wishful thinking to colour his assessment. In a lengthy entry titled “India and the foreigner” he wrote: “India is under foreign control and the foreigner is the kindest of all foreigners available. To get rid of the foreigner

by force or fraud is an idea associated with all incidents that remind us of the rule being foreign. The idea naturally haunts our uneducated instincts; to the educated instincts the idea is both foolish and fallacious. It is foolish because it is not practicable, and because any experiment founded upon it would send the country from the frying pan into the fire. It is fallacious idea, because the distinction between a native and a foreigner is only transient, and the distinction is not a guarantee of a native being a better ruler than the foreigner in such a mass of heterogenous people as my country is.”⁶⁹

He is not only emphasising his lack of faith in the strategies employed by Indians to get rid of the British but is questioning the basic premise of “foreign” and “native” interests being mutually exclusive. Moreover his absence of trust in the abilities of natives to manage heterogenous people with differing aspirations and needs also colours the assessment of the problem.

He goes on to articulate the real problem. “(the) problem is not the absolute eviction of the foreigner, but *his accommodation to the native element...* where India and England *become one on Indian Soil...*”⁷⁰ One can assume that while cautioning against attempts to evict the foreigner completely from Indian soil Govardhanram is referring not just to the physical presence, but to a civilisational encounter, and his stand was informed by the awareness that Indian culture and society will be transformed by this “drama of transition.” The source of his anxiety lies in the uncertainty about the future and how these opposing tendencies will be harmonised and what kind of a resolution will emerge. To bring about a resolution where “England become one on Indian Soil” he required to “create a homogeneous nuclear class.”

This also was the central concern of *Sarasvatichandra*. At the same time he was not unaware of the opposition between *foreign* and native interests. He elaborated in the same entry: “In India the sovereign is enlightened and yet has an interest foreign to the country. Two things have to be done. This interest has to be made to cease to be foreign; and while it is foreign, we want the natives that shall guard against the civic temptations to which the foreigner is

exposed by his position, that shall enable the native interests to grow and develop during their minority without any hindrance from the adverse interests of the rulers, that shall infact watch over the real interests and develop the future welfare of the country. And it is possible to do this both loyally and patriotically.”⁷¹

In the four volumes of *Sarasvatibandha* he attempted to demonstrate this wisdom. The first part of the novel – which is the depiction of reality according to him – deals with the expanding British influence over the native states. It is one of the most severe indictment of native states in the literature of that period. He depicts a polity based on personal interests, plagued by widespread erosion of morals and values. The efforts of Buddhidhan and Bhupsingh to overthrow the corrupt administration of Shathrai were in the final analysis based on personal animosity and personal gain. “Buddhidhan had turned Bhupsingh and the entire administration into instruments of revenge for a deep animosity.”⁷² The only thing that differentiates Buddhidhan from Shathrai is the former’s high sense of personal morality.

More condemning attitudes towards the native states are perhaps reflected in the *Scrap-Books*, where Govardhanram feels no compulsion for moderation. While he was contemplating retirement from legal practice he had many tempting offers from native states in Gujarat to join the administration as *dewan*. Given his financial insecurities, a few years of *devanship* would have put many fears at rest. This position would also have provided him an opportunity to work for the good of society. Giving his reasons for refusing these offers, he displayed his true feeling about the affairs of the native states. He wrote: “Baroda, Junagadh, Kutch, Bhavnagar, and what not? – all native states in fact stand before my eyes, with their whole nudity of weaknesses, complications and difficulties – from subjects, officers, the princes themselves and even from Agencies...” The mere thought of being in that environment filled him with a “vision of pettiest jealousies, meanest natures, foolishest ambitions, ridiculous follies and vanities, and adamant obstructions.”⁷³ Perhaps this assessment of the native states has much to do with his unhappy stay at Bhavnagar in the service of the *dewan*.

He also felt that the efforts made in the native states for the betterment of society are unlikely to bear fruit. This, would amount to narrowing his vision. He adds in the same entry; “Besides, the greatest result available in this field can only be local influence – while the kind of influence that is wanted is one that could permeate and stimulate the whole constitution of India. This larger effect must be begun and produced in British India where the plant, if sown, can have a freer, larger growth along what Telang called the line of least resistance.”⁷⁴

During this period he returned to this theme with regularity. Perturbed by his thoughts of retirement from active legal practice his family and friends tried to persuade him to take up tempting offers. A few days after the entry quoted above, he elaborated upon the “thorns of inferior society in Political life in Native States.”⁷⁵ His chief objection to servicing in a native state that he would have to deal with people of inferior intellectual abilities. “No Prince can be equal to your education, and no fellow servant disposed to have your conscience in the present state of things.” This situation he says is “not much dissimilar to the marriage of a man of my education and age with an illiterate girl of twelve, whom you must try to please and educate with all the arts of one attempting to make love with such an odd match.”⁷⁶

Govardhanram’s other concern is about moral life in the native states. One may be forced to work with people who may not have any sense of duty, and even if they have it, it is likely to be “in a disfigured, mutilated, and even perverted form.”⁷⁷ And therefore “I shall have to guard warily against the Fallacious Persuasions of the Serpentine Tempter, if ever he takes me near the Tree of Service.” There is little doubt that Govardhanram’s assessment of the native states is largely negative and he does not see much potential for “kindling the spark of organic flame” in such areas. Nevertheless, native states were a given reality and large areas of the country were under the administration of the native states.

It was imperative that he should turn his attention to these states in the novel. The third part of the novel – subtitled *Ratnanagari nu Rajyatantra* – deals

with the creation of an “ideal” native state. From the third part onwards the narrative of the novel enters a different phase. Henceforth, normative considerations are given primacy over the depiction of reality.

This part of the novel deals with the efforts of the state to maintain autonomy and introduce elements of oligarchic democracy in times of greater British domination. In a courageous portrayal of the events of 1857 he showed how the British presence was oppressive and at the same time how it created the space for a fundamental change in Indian society.

When the third part was published in 1898, there was “a strong rumour” in Ahmedabad that Govardhanram was arrested in Bombay “for writing sedition in this part of the novel.” His wife, mother and sister spent two agonising days in Nadiad, till his telegram and letter reached them, quashing the speculation. This incident sparked off a reaction in him. “Was it a mistake to have written a book which has so disturbed the peace and happiness of my family? What is my duty? To boldly write such a book for my people or secure the peace of my family against such contingency? I find it impossible to solve the question...”⁷⁸ At that moment he might have been uncertain about the desirability of his enterprise, but such doubts did not plague him for long. “My book is not only loyal, but my innermost soul feels that it is written for and must tend to the welfare of both the rulers and the ruled.”⁷⁹ The inclusion of the rulers is not surprising as for him the term “my people” include Englishmen “so far as the lot of my country is joined with or rests upon them.”⁸⁰

The third part also deals with the efforts of Maniraj – an embodiment of *Kshatriya*, and trained in western learning under the wise counsel of his former teacher and present *devan* Vidyachatur – to create a polity based on the principles of consumption.

Vidyachatur – after proper study of British administration and native states – had formulated a guiding principle for the polity. “If the administrators

of the native states act with knowledge, intelligence, moral values and possess the will; they can contribute to the growth and welfare of their people to a level to which the subjects of British India cannot aspire to, even in their dreams.”⁸¹ The efforts of the entire administration were geared towards the realisation of this vision. Vidyachatur’s private and public conduct was also reminiscent of Govardhanram’s reflections in his *Scrap-Books* on the role of an ideal minister. While discussing, what to his mind, were the short comings of the *dewan* of Baroda, Govardhanram elaborated the role of a minister. The chief short coming of the *dewan* according to him was that, “he lost sight of the fact that his master was his master, and not his child or subordinate.” He went to describe the right conduct, “I think the ministers are bound to lead Princes by sweet arts and obedient power, to manage them as clever wives manage husbands and nurses manage patients, and to work upon their souls by inspiration of love, awe, reverence, spirit of friendship, regard for ability and experience, and shrewdness and sagacity, and confidence in motives.”⁸² Govardhanram felt that most ministers, given their superior intelligence and ability, tend to consider themselves the fountainhead of all power and welfare and “ignore, or even forget, that the well-being of the state *does* consist in allowing the last energy of power to retain its vested seat in the brain that wears the crown...”⁸³ Such patient and ever watchful caution was embodied in the *dewan* of Bhavnagar’s Samaldas Parmananddas, on whose personality the character of Vidyachatur is believed to be based

In spite of having created an ideal native state, Govardhanram remained suspicious of desirability and efficacy of action taken in the native states. He gave release to his conflicting emotions through a dialogue between the residents of British India and the administrators of Ratnanagari.⁸⁴

Virrao, a touring intellectual from Mumbai takes an arrogant abolitionist stand. According to him “all is rotten to the core” in the native states. Their corrupt and decadent influence has spread to other areas and is preventing their growth, destroying their morals and polity, “damn your states and politics for preventing all dictates of truth.”⁸⁵ No amount of remedial measures, he

observes, will be able to save these states from certain doom. The states should be allowed to destroy themselves, “They are doomed and shall cease and the sooner the better.”

Against this Chandrakant takes a more cautious stance. One thing he believes is certain, change is inevitable. The local states have already been reduced to “Local Governing Agencies.” Their authority will ultimately be totally subjected to the British administration. Echoing Govardhanram’s desire for a homogenised group to mediate the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, he says that the rulers and administrators of the native states should form such enlightened aristocracy.

Shankarsharma, an official in the administration of Ratnanagari, provides an impassioned defense of the native state. Like others he also lapses into English. “The maturity of our own moral and intellectual attitude, whenever we reach it in distant future, will not fail to command respect and love in the brightest circles among Englishmen, if English instincts will have survived that period.”⁸⁶ After this optimistic vision, he articulates the impulse which defines the administration of Ratnanagari. He continues, “The Princes that will have then led their subjects to a climax of genuine prosperity, a vision of which a foreign Government will have tried in vain to conjure up before their own Indian subjects, will present a divine spectacle which will make your English Rulers blush with an awakened consciousness of their own inner frailties!”⁸⁷ Trying to close this endless debate, Vidyachatur feels that in these ambiguous times only one thing is certain. We are witnessing a strange transition, he says, where only certainty is change. The society will not be able to go back entirely to what it was. Those who are oblivious to these changes will be left behind in the dark legions. From these conversations and Govardhanram’s own reflections, it is not difficult to discern the voice of Govardhanram.

He was willing to accept the British domination as a fact. The cause of real concern for him was not subjection but the ability of the Indian people

and their rulers of the native states to work for an uncertain, yet harmonised future. His lack of faith in the ability of the Indian people and their leaders to reflect on the consequences of their actions is striking. Though his condemnation of the native states was severe and total, he accepted them as a given reality in an attempt to create an idealised polity. But not without voicing his own apprehensions about the desirability and efficacy of the welfare measures taken in these states.

Govardhanram was ready to accept the reality of the native states at a larger political level but in his personal life he remained sceptical of either their desirability or normative superiority over the British rule. Notwithstanding his three year long stay in Bhavnagar, he refused in the latter part of life to be drawn in or lured by money and power, and refrained from accepting any position in a native state.

Sarasvatichandra left his parental home, renounced his wealth and broke his engagement with Kumud mainly because he wished to travel around the country to understand and experience the social conditions. He hoped that this understanding would enable him to gain a much clearer vision of the regeneration of his country.

Towards the end of his travel, on his last repose on *Chirungushrung* he outlined his vision to Kumud.

As he had renounced his wealth, he did not possess enough resources to carry out the project in its entirety and hence, initially he outlined a part of his vision. Sarasvatichandra had inherited about four lakhs of rupees from his mother, which over the years had grown to about six-seven lakhs. He hoped to carry out the initial phase of the project utilising the interest from this amount. Sarasvatichandra felt that the material wealth of the country was being drained and more importantly people appeared to be losing the art of creating wealth. Moreover, he felt that if people were unable to live by norms, within limits prescribed by *Dharma* in a situation of poverty, it would prove disastrous for the entire society.

The first part of the project concerned itself with material regeneration of the country, it certainly had a social component built into it.

Sarasvatichandra, decided to select one person from among those who had passed their B.A. examination and had shown marked aptitude for commerce and industry and had entrepreneurial ability. This selected individual was to be placed as a trainee/apprentice for two years with successful traders and businessman. During this period of training the selected person would be paid a monthly salary of Rs.30/-. After successful completion of this phase, the trainee would be sent for a period of three years to America or Europe to learn the commercial practices and trends of the West. After three years the person would be sent to any other part of the world for one year. During this stay abroad he would be given a salary which would not exceed the interest earnings on a capital of Rs.40,000/-

After his exposure abroad the trainee would again spend two years in India refining his skills and knowledge. After this extensive training of almost eight years, Sarasvatichandra hoped that the “learned entrepreneur” will not seek fulfillment of narrow personal ambitions and desires, nor will he amass wealth by unfair means or by exploiting the under privileged. He will conduct himself according to the norms appropriate for his time – *Yugdharma* – and will strive for the betterment of the entire society.

Given the limited resources, the project will be able to fund only one person every two years. Thus in a period of twelve years, Sarasvatichandra hoped to create atleast six “learned entrepreneurs” for the material regeneration of the country.

If the material regeneration was one issue facing the country, the weakening strength of the country, and the weakening strength of the younger generation was another issue. Sarasvatichandra believed that the younger generation not only provide support to the old and the very young, they act as a link between the past and the present. Societal well-being is anchored in its

knowledge and for knowledge to flourish the well-being of the younger generation is essential. Hence, they resolved to undertake a pilgrimage to different parts of the country every alternate year to understand the conditions of the younger generation. By experiencing their reality, their hopes, aspirations, problems and failings they hoped to nurture and shape a generation of people who will be better able to look after themselves. Women play an anchoring role in the organisation of family and society, they felt. Kumud would work with women, help bring new knowledge, different social trends in the domestic sphere in order to transform it. Eventually, they hoped, women would come out and will be allowed to come out of the domestic space to participate in the project for social regeneration.

This was the more practical plan according to Sarasvatichandra. He had a larger dream which he outlined for Kumud.

Sarasvatichandra believed that the country was passing through a “drama of transition.” What was required was a group of people who would act as a link between opposing tendencies. A group of people who would have “Knowledge” about the traditions of the past, new trends in society and also knowledge about forces which are bringing about fundamental changes in all spheres. This community, he believed, had to provide a vision for the future and act to realise it. It will have to contain opposing tendencies and harmonise them in the future formations.

This community will not only have to address social and civilisational issues but will have to act to bring about economic and material regeneration of the country. Sarasvatichandra’s project was to create this community. He called this community *Kalyangram*.

The self-sufficient, autonomous community and facilities of *Kalyangram* were designed to act as a permanent retreat for those who wished to engage with the idea of regeneration. While describing the outline Sarasvatichandra displays the same obsessive concern for clarity and attention to minute details as his creator Govardhanram.

The core community of *Kalyangram* will comprise three groups:

- a) Modern intellectuals who had successfully passed the highest examination of the newly introduced English education.
- b) Traditional scholars
- c) Accomplished artists, craft persons and artisans.

On the basis of a careful selection process, individuals will be invited to be a part of the community. This community was for those people who had the ability to carry out independent and autonomous pursuits, and not for students who would require constant guidance and supervision.

The Central preoccupation of the scholars and intellectuals would be to understand those traditions, beliefs and knowledge systems in which the communities of the past were anchored. They would also study the forces of change. Western and especially British ideals of society, culture and economy would form an integral part of their study. The inhabitants of the community would undertake regular study tours and travels to understand the emerging social conditions.

Their study in libraries and laboratories, combined with an understanding derived from experiencing reality, these scholars it was hoped, would be able to provide a vision for the future. Their concern, Sarasvatichandra emphasised, ought not to be with debates of ideological or theological nature, but with the quest for Truth.

The crafts persons and artisans would study the ancient art and craft traditions. Combining their understanding of new technologies, they would attempt to rejuvenate the withering traditions and practices. The earlier outlined plan for economic regeneration would also form an integral part of this community's endeavours.

The permanent residents of this community would be provided with all necessities of life. *Viharbhavan* would house married couples and their children,

Kumarbharan, unmarried men, and *Strbhavan*, widows and, when social conditions permitted, unmarried “sisters of mercy.” There would be appropriate medical facilities and schools for the children of permanent residents. Living quarters would also be provided to the visiting parents and relatives of the members of the community for a limited period.

The community would also invite eminent thinkers, authors, journalists, editors and businessmen to interact with the residents. The community would also have places of workshop of all faiths where believers and theologians would interact among themselves and the members of the community. The administration of *Kalyangram*, over and above meeting the living expense of all residents, would give a monthly honorarium of Rs. 10 to Rs. 50/-. Depending upon the review of their performance and contribution, their honorarium would be increased, once after three years and once after ten years.

The self-sufficient community, Sarasvatichandra hoped would be able to create a base for a harmonious future.

The historiography of social reform in modern India is familiar with the primacy given to the question of widow remarriage. It is also familiar with the dichotomy between belief and action which casts a shadow on these efforts.

The attempt here is neither to give a history of social reform nor to understand the reasons for tensions within the structures of belief. The focus here is on Govardhanram’s response to the question of widow remarriage. The scale and depth at which he “dealt with the question of widow remarriage remained unparalleled in Nineteenth century Indian literature.”⁸⁶

The novel appeared to be moving towards an end where marriage between widowed Kumud and Sarasvatichandra did not appear implausible. It culminated in the marriage between Sarasvatichandra and Kusum, the younger sister of Kumud. This sudden denouement has perplexed many commentators of *Sarasvatichandra*.

Despite the definitive resolution presented in the novel the love between Kumud and Sarasvatichandra is closely examined through various characters, each bringing forth their desired resolution.

To understand the logic of this final resolution it is necessary to follow the thought processes of Kumud, Sarasvatichandra, Chandrakant and Kumud's father Vidyachatur. From their conversations and from the *Scarp-Books* we need to discern the voice of Govardhanram.

Though, Kumud and Sarasvatichandra appear to be in total control of their passions and desires, they do enter into a spiritual marriage in their dream stage.

At the conscious level, Sarasvatichandra operates from a position of overwhelming guilt. Holding himself responsible for Kumud's trials and present misery he is consumed by a sense of sin and seeks atonement. For him atonement lies in publicly accepting Kumud as a wife. This he feels is his *dharmā* and his dreams and desires of regeneration of his society must be conditional upon the performance of *dharmā*. His *svādharmā* compels him to propose marriage to Kumud.

Kumud responds to this from a different notion of *dharmā*. Kumud is governed by ideals of pure love. Her fulfillment and meaning is now to be sought in the achievement of Sarasvatichandra's project of regeneration. At the same time she cannot also conceive disruption of her spiritual union with Sarasvatichandra.

Kumud is keenly aware that Sarasvatichandra and his project require a companion – wife. At the same time, the society remains hostile to the idea of a widow's remarriage. If they were to marry, Sarasvatichandra will be excommunicated and his dreams of mediating the societal forces to shape the destiny of his country will remain incomplete, as effective intervention will not be possible from outside the boundaries of society. The only real option open

to Kumud was to continue as an ascetic but remain enjoined spiritually to Sarasvatichandra and his project.

They cannot find a way out of their predicament and decide to be guided by Chandrakant's opinion.

Chandrakant posits three possible choices before them. If they decide to get married, he opines that, they will have to give up their dreams of social regeneration. As a witness of their spiritual love he cannot advise them to lead separate lives. Kumud's idea of spiritual union does not seem feasible to him. He believes that the society will not and cannot differentiate between *sukshma* and *sthula*, especially in case of man-woman relationship. He articulates the most desired option which he feels will meet with least resistance from the family and society. Kumud and Sarasvatichandra should continue their spiritual union, Kusum and Sarasvatichandra should get married. In this way, Kusum's desire to remain unmarried can also be fulfilled, though differently. Kusum and Sarasvatichandra can marry for the benefit of the society and not indulge in physical relationship. Sarasvatichandra's project will also benefit by two able and dedicated companions.

Sarasvatichandra is not even willing to abide by such "fictions." He cannot allow pragmatic considerations to dictate over his *dharma*. "Duty first and then only our most cherished dreams,"⁸⁹ he says and Chandrakant is forced to bow to his decision. All three of them decide to leave the final decision to Kumud.

The other significant thought process is that of Vidyachatur. He is uncertain about the fate of his daughter. The possibility of her being alive saddens his heart, as she will be condemned to conventional widowhood. This thought is insufferable but he must think of Kumud's future. He asks himself, not insignificantly in English, "But as a practical man can I not see my remedy for a disease which threatens to be a fact?", and he offers an answer, "Other nations have it – mine bars it."⁹⁰

The refusal of his nation and society to offer a remedy for this problem does not prevent further pontification. He continues in English: “Conventional widowhood! Social Terrorism! Must you stand between me and my love and duty to my dear child? Here is a calamity; here is escape from it – And yet the poor one must suffer and not escape! and why? Because the stronger sex controls her lot. Is it proper in a father to submit to the control and see the child withering before his eyes, because he is a social-moral-coward?”⁹¹

At this moment the only solace he is able to derive is from his faith in Sarasvatichandra. Since Sarasvatichandra had courage to spurn so much wealth, still nursing the image of Kumud he may show the audacity of accepting widowed Kumud as wife.

He has faith in the courage of Sarasvatichandra but lacked confidence in his own abilities to make moral choices. The personal and social price of this subversive insanity appeared to be too high. His old father and uncle are unlikely to be hospitable to such an idea. Gunsundati might agree, but only because it is *his* desire. The social uproar and resulting marginalisation will make him unfit for *demanship*.

Despite the dangers entailed in his thought of widow remarriage he was unable to brush aside the idea. The awareness of having committed a “Great Sin” by marrying her to an undeserving person without waiting for the person she loved, takes possession of him. His moment of truth arrives when they receive definitive news about Kumud. Kumud and Sarasvatichandra are both alive and together on Sundargiri.

His mind is filled with apprehension, joy, sorrow and fear, for if the news of their cohabitation were to spread, the social opprobrium would consign him and his family to the margins. He still does not lose faith in the goodness of his daughter and Sarasvatichandra. He draws solace from the fact that Vishnudas will not have allowed *adbarmik* practices in his *ashram*.

After a painful dialogue with himself and Gunsundari, Vidyachatur arrives at a notion of his *svadharma*. He makes a distinction which was crucial to the debates on social reform at that time. He stresses that widow remarriage is opposed only by *Lokachar* – popular custom – and not *Dharma*. Hence, he will not even resort to the stratagem suggested by his father to marry Kumud and Sarasvatichandra secretly to ward off a social uproar.

Finally he is ready to own the burden of his deeds. He confesses that by submitting to *Lokachar* masquerading as *Dharma*, he had destroyed Kumud's liberty and pushed her into a sea of sorrows. His atonement lies in subjecting all other notions of *Dharma* to his *Dharma* towards the daughter.

He makes a resolve to take the "right" action and allow both daughters the liberty to decide their own future. If Kumud and Sarasvatichandra wish to marry, he decides, he will actively support their desire. As this is not only *Dharma* but "in civilized countries it is also the ultimate test of parental love." He and his family will pay the price of such an action. Kusum will also be free to exercise her free will; if she decides to remain unmarried she will not be forced to be otherwise.

The final resolution proposed by Kumud – marriage of Kusum and Sarasvatichandra and an ascetic life for herself – and accepted by all comes as a surprise.

Sudhir Chandra has observed that in this "*Sarasvatichandra* reflects the contemporary ambivalence with regard to the desirability of widow remarriage."⁹² While the novel depicts a poignant portrayal of the human condition and the dilemma posed by the idea of widow-remarriage, this final resolution renders the powerful portrayal somewhat ineffective.

One can assume that the final choice was dictated neither by aesthetic considerations nor by faith in the validity of social practice. The answer must lie in Govardhanram's ethico-moral universe. Reacting to the death of a

relative's wife he writes in an entry dated 27th February, 1906,⁹³ "of course a new substitute will be sought for one that is gone. When a husband dies, the widow cannot get a similar relief." From this anguished personal response to an unjust social practice the tone undergoes a subtle shift in the following lines. "Our reformers complain of this injustice to her. The complaint is as right and the sympathy for her as well deserved as the custom against her is successful in keeping her down." In these lines his displeasure against the system is clear but at the same time from a personal response he moves to a general, societal plane. The reader is surprised at the rationalisation that is sought in the next lines. The entry continues "But this is not a mere question of right vs. might. The custom is based upon Joint Family Exigencies, and the Castes and have not it admit divorce too on easier terms than law can afford. New circumstances will probably bring out some happier compromise. In the meanwhile, orthodoxy, with nature's gift of self-preserving instincts, must hold its own as an iron wall, and reformers grow wiser and less sorrowful in their frequent knocking of heads against the wall, until the wall begins to crumble and the heads grow stronger by frequent exercise in knocking and breaking; and a new scheme of reciprocal adaptation between Family, caste and justice sparks out of the friction. But I won't lecture here."

His feelings for the victim of social practice appears to be genuine but concern for social equilibrium does not allow him to fully empathise with the victim and denounce an unjust system. He moves from the emotive to the discursive. A similar kind of ambivalence is evident in his attitude to the joint family. A similar attitude informs *Lilavati Jivankala*⁹¹ Noting Lilavati's support to the reformist call of banning child-marriage but her opposition to the demand for widow remarriage, Govardhanram informs us that Lilavati's attitude embodies the dilemma of Vidyachatur and Gunsundari at one level and voice the reasoned opinions of many social reformers at another level. Govardhanram goes on to add that Vidyachatur's desire for, and support to Kumud's marriage to Sarasvatichandra even at the cost of *devanship* was a just and moral desire. At the same time Gunsundari's opposition to it was equally just in so far as she understood the "moral strength and purity of

womanhood.” Once again he desists from expressing his personal stand. He moves on to the enunciation of the social reform movement. He articulated the perspective of those social reformers who had been advocating caution in case of widow remarriage. He says that his group wishes to remain neutral in this debate. It is not that they are unmoved by the plight of the victims of widowhood, but their neutrality arises from two factors: By obstructing widow remarriage they are not performing their duties to the widows, and by sanctioning it, they also fear the consequences of widespread prevalence of widow remarriages. The fears, he says, were articulated by Prof. Bhandarkar who believed that, (a) the good of the nation and society is not entailed in the happiness of a few widows and (b) there are already existing mechanisms of man-woman sensual relationships. By creating one more avenue for amorous liaisons, the moral fabric of civilised conduct will be threatened. In this intervention also he is at pains to distance himself from any position.

We are given one more opportunity to discern his position on the final resolution of the dilemma.

During 1906 Dayaram Gidumal, a Sindhi social reformer and at that time District Judge of Surat entered into a dialogue with Govardhanram.⁹⁵

Dayaram endorsed Govardhanram’s decision of not marrying widowed Kumud to Sarasvatichandra. But he had several objections to the manner in which Govardhanram had brought about the resolution of the intertwined fates of Kumud, Kusum and Sarasvatichandra. He believed the Govardhanram had been wrong in marrying Sarasvatichandra to Kusum, whose desire was to remain unmarried.

His principal objections to this arrangement were three:

- (a) Kusum would eventually regret her choice and as a consequence she, Kumud, Sarasvatichandra and her parents would be unhappy;
- (b) Sarasvatichandra’s marriage to Kusum was in no way a necessary precondition to the success of *Kalyangram*. Kumud, leading the life

of an ascetic and Kusum as a 'Sister of Mercy' could have contributed to this project by working for the upliftment of women; (c) and finally, that Govardhanram had been very cruel to his hero, as he had already enjoined his heart and soul to Kumud. It is highly unlikely, Dayaram argued, that he can remain faithful to both the sisters and remain true to himself.⁹⁶

Govardhanram's initial response to this criticism was weak and superficial.⁹⁵ He argued that a ground for such a resolution was already prepared in the previous sections of the novel, where Kusum is shown to be fascinated by Sarasvatichandra. Kusum's unconscious fascination was not physical, it was spiritual. She was attracted to the high ideals of his hero

Govardhanram further argued that this resolution was proposed by Kumud and had the sanction of both families and the *sadhis* of Sundargiri.

Govardhanram's weak defense did not satisfy Dayaram. Responding to his letter immediately, Dayaram persisted in his criticism and re-emphasised his opinion that Govardhanram's decision was cruel.

Govardhanram responded to this charge at various levels. He argued that this resolution did not go against Kumud's notion of ideal love, nor against Sarasvatichandra's sense of duty. Kumud's arguments had convinced Kusum and she was willing participant in the union.

He further argued that he had intended to subject Sarasvatichandra and Kumud to various tests and trials in 1885 when he had begun writing the novel. Kumud and Sarasvatichandra's love for each other was not anchored in the desire of the body but in the desire of their souls. During their stay in the cave they had successfully crushed all the desires of the body and their soul had emerged victorious. They had even negated the pleasure of touch which they experienced during their moments of unconscious weakness. Anticipating the charge that this can happen only in an ideal world, Govardhanram

reminded Dayaram that this hero and heroine were in the midst of a divine presence during their stay in the cave. Govardhanram agreed that this arrangement militates against the laws of nature. But he nevertheless, defends his position on a civilisational ground. He argued that the essence of Hinduism consists in militating against what worldly beings consider as natural. He draws Dayaram's attention to the present predicament of his country, where educated Indians were vacillating between what was considered as natural and given, and the new rebellions. Moreover, Hindus have always considered *dharna* superior to the animal instincts of human beings.

Govardhanram felt that the present social condition was inhospitable to unmarried women. This denied to Kusum the possibility of becoming a "Sister of Mercy." He reminded Dayaram the fate of Pandita Ramabai who was excommunicated by her society. He did not want such a fate for Kusum

Govardhanram invoked his personal notions of "Duties towards the country." He said that from the beginning he intended that his characters would act as guiding angels to their countrymen and expressed his confidence that his hopes will bear fruit. Despite holding on to his position Govardhanram finally confessed that his *real* need was to find a companion – wife for Sarasvatichandra and his project. Kumud's social condition made her unsuitable for this. And there was not one more appropriate than Kumud's sister, considering her intelligence and superior natural virtues.⁹⁷

Despite his confession Dayaram remained unconvinced.⁹⁸ He argued that such a resolution can be defended from the point of *Parmarthik Satya* but will not stand the test of either *Vyabarik Satya* or ideal love. He argued that Sita would never married Ravana even if the Gods and Rama himself had tried to convince her. Govardhanram agreed to both the arguments. But insisted that *Parmarthik Satya* negates the presence of love and his hero was a love-less being. Not willing to engage in further debate, he attributed the choice to "the mood of hour," which made him "conduct consciously and right or wrong there it stands."⁹⁹

Dayaram closed the debate but not before issuing the final indictment. “...I only hope the children of your imagination won’t blame for your mood of the moment, when you meet them in the ideal world.”¹⁰⁰

Given his obsession with the philosophy of consumption, with its emphasis of negating the self for higher goals, the subjugation of the idea of widow remarriage at a philosophical level is not surprising. Even less surprising is the subordination of the possibility of remarriage to the twin ideals of ascetic renunciation and spiritual union.

His ethico-moral universe had space for relativisation of *dharma*, of subjecting a minor duty to a higher ideal – but it had no space for pragmatic – practical considerations. His confession that his *real* need was to find a suitable companion – wife for Sarasvatichandra and his project, and his admission that widowed Kūmud was not suitable for this, coupled with his final resort to the “mood of the hour” are informed by practical, pragmatic considerations. He resorts to the realm of the practical, without any feeling of moral anxiety or moral anger. This admission is difficult to explain.

Is it possible to conclude like one perceptive observer has, that Govardhanram, in the final analysis is for widow remarriage and he is proposing only a “temporary deferment” of that process?¹⁰¹

It is true that Govardhanram displayed similar tendencies on the question of joint family. The imperatives of social equilibrium forced him to reconsider his existential experience. But, he remained sceptical of the normative superiority of the institution of joint family.

His ambivalence on the question of widow remarriage is of a different kind. His attack on the institution of joint family was rooted in a personal sense of victimhood. He considered himself, Lilavati and to some extent Lalita “martyrs to the cause of joint family.” In the case of widow remarriage he is able to distance his existential experience and larger societal issues. His not so

subtle shift in the note of 27 February 1906 from personal to discursive, can perhaps be explained by this. Moreover, on the issue of joint family it is easy to discern a dominant position and ascribe it to Govardhanram. In the case of widow re-marriage it is not so easy. In the novel, the *Scrap-Books* and *Lilavati Juvankala* Govardhanram does give play to different view points. But, at the same time, he makes painfully contrived attempts to disguise his own voice.

This makes one suspect his support to the cause of widow re-marriage. This suspicion is not without basis. One can – without the danger of over interpretation – ascribe a position to Govardhanram. He did feel – like Prof. Bhandarkar and many others – that the good of the nation was not entailed in the cause of a few widows. And that a society can afford to wait “until the wall begins to crumble and heads grow stronger... and a new scheme of reciprocal adaptation between Family, Caste and justice sparks out of the Friction.” This statement is suggestive of his unwillingness to make any intervention in the societal forces shaping the destiny of his country.

This hesitation negates the core values which informed his moral universe and his project of shaping a generation of people higher and stronger than they are

This crippling hesitation, coupled with his attempts to relativise *dharmā* and his sudden introduction of purely pragmatic considerations, without any moral rage, do not allow us to conclude that “he is for widow remarriage” and is proposing “only a temporary deferment” of that desired objective.

We are not only concerned with the fate of his societal endeavours, but also with the fate of Govardhanram and two other individuals, irrevocably bound to him. Their minds and souls were the first that he tried to cultivate in accordance with his ideals and philosophy. These two were Lalita, Govardhanram’s second wife, and Lilavati, their daughter.

It is important for us to consider the fates of these three not only because they were played out almost simultaneously to his public endeavour, but also because, for Govardhanram there was no marked disjunction between giving his country a vision of an ideal society and of educating and 'raising' his wife and daughter. These two projects were essentially the same; both were integral to his personal *dharma* towards the country. And as Govardhanram himself put it, "my country is a term which must be confined in the beginning and made to expand in course of time only."¹⁰²

Govardhanram showed keen awareness of the intertwined fates of those inhabiting his *manorajya* and his own self and his family.¹⁰³ In a moment of rare passion Govardhanram had said, "*I only want their souls.*"¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the only source of deriving some understanding about the possible fates of his societal endeavour is the lives of Govardhanram, Lilavati and Lalita, as they tried to live a life of consumptive virtue. It is in their biographies that Govardhanram's "grand project" unfolds itself completely.

Govardhanram's marriage to Harilaxmi was fixed before their birth. A close 'conjugal' relationship developed between the two. But, the relationship between adolescent Harilaxmi and Govardhanram's dominating mother Shivkashi was one of constant conflict; torn between love for his young wife and his sense of duty towards his mother, Govardhanram seriously contemplated running away from his conflict ridden house to start a new life.¹⁰⁵ Govardhanram's first marriage ended tragically – Harilaxmi died in 1874 while giving birth to their child, who also died soon after. Govardhanram was to express his deep anguish and a sense of permanent loss in two verses – *Hridayruditsbatakam* and *Snehmudra* – that he wrote in memory of Harilaxmi and in which he paid glowing tributes to her.¹⁰⁶ Reflecting on his first marriage Govardhanram wrote in 1893, "My first marriage was meant to be a cruel hoax which my wife lived and was eventually to leave me a widower."¹⁰⁷ "Delighted at the prospect of a living relieved from future marriage,"¹⁰⁸ Govardhanram was married to Lalitagauri in 1876. Many years later he complained "I was then married, under conditions to which I would have never assented, if I had not

been kept ignorant of them, to a girl reputedly ill-bred...”¹⁰⁹ Govardhanram, secure in his faith in the philosophy of consumption tried to cultivate in his “ill-bred” wife the high ideals of this philosophy. “My duty does not end with satisfying her poor ideals, but I am bound to enlarge them. This is my marital duty...”¹¹⁰ Govardhanram lists his “duties” towards his wife as under:

“a) to train her up b) to raise her life c) to make her free d) to provide for her e) to fulfill her aspirations with such luxuries etc., as a husband in love and duty ought to give her”¹¹¹

For Govardhanram his primary obligation towards his wife to “train” her. By training he did not imply “educating” her in the conventional sense of imparting literacy, as he time and again laments the facts that he was not able to educate her.¹¹² Training for Govardhanram primarily meant imparting to her those virtues and ideals which would enable her to lead her life according to the tenets of the philosophy of consumption.

For Lalita, the first thirteen years of her life with Govardhanram were years of training under his constant guidance and close supervision. Not given to impassioned display of his feelings, Govardhanram is nevertheless ecstatic in his praise of Lalita’s moral strength to continuously lead a life of self-negation and self-inflicted deprivation. There are repeated references of Lalita’s moral virtues and a life of self-sacrifice in his *Scrap-Books* of this period. He writes, “last thirteen years have been a life of training for her, and her life is high. Industrious to the fullest extent, virtuous and charitable, active and clever, enthusiastic and untiring in her domestic work and in the work of rendering me happy and all in the family, she has nobly-successfully-and touchingly borne, and willingly undertaken, the heaviest self-sacrifice for all this – the sacrifice of health, of liberty, of all luxuries, of all enjoyments – of her own wants and aspirations, and the most usual of worldly enjoyments, - of her tastes and temper – and of everything possible under the sun...”¹¹³ Govardhanram cannot hide his feelings of a personal success and achievement in training Lalita. “*I have trained* wife from the beginning to do voluntary and

loving service and sacrifice to my people. She has done it. She has worked like an ass for my people..."¹¹⁴ Lalita's sole aspiration of life becomes making Govardhanram and his family happy. For this she earns Govardhanram's unqualified praise. Her latest change of disposition compels Govardhanram "to adore and make *arti* to her soul-to her goodness, to her virtue-to her understanding-and to her moral power."¹¹⁵ Lalita's sacrifice compels Govardhanram – who constantly lived with a feeling of his own moral and intellectual superiority – to put her on a pedestal even higher than himself "Her life is higher than mine."¹¹⁶ This was the greatest recognition that Govardhanram could have given to any one, he even called her "Family's Angel."¹¹⁷ Lalita even succeeds in acquiring respect from the quarrelsome and dominating Shivkashi. She compares Lalita to Gunsundari; the ideal and perfect embodiment of consumption created by Govardhanram in his novel *Sarasvatichandra*.¹¹⁸

His "heaven" does not last for long. The familiar discord re-enters their life. Govardhanram records instances of conflict between his wife and mother and between Lalita and his brother's wife. He records, with some satisfaction, his own efforts to be an "impartial judge" in these conflicts and reflects on "Family misunderstandings and the way to remove them."¹¹⁹ As the conflicts and discord become deeper he is forced to re-evaluate Lalita's morals and virtues. He is ruthless in her condemnation; he wrote, "My wife is inadequate to be my heroine, alas, she falls far too short of my Gunsundari."¹²⁰ Lalita's failure to continuously lead a life of consumption forces Govardhanram to grapple with a more fundamental question of how to successfully "raise" our women. He also reflects on his *own* failure to do so. "Are our women to be raised? How? Take a particular woman, and see, how? ...I have tried them with my mother, my wife... The result of my labours have been that both mother and wife have turned into discontented imperfect machines – square pegs in round holes – my mother the peg and my wife the hole!"¹²¹ Even this clear admission of failure does not introduce any element of doubt regarding his mission of cultivating minds and tempering the souls of his countrymen. Instead, quite characteristically, he sees in this failure a new *raison d'etre* for his endeavours:

“99 out of 100 individuals will give up without thinking of the society,” he says, but, “my crucifixion in my own family must direct me to raise from this grave and try to relieve my countrymen from the troubles from which I could not relieve myself. *The next generation must always benefit by the adversities of its predecessors.*”¹²²

Govardhanram was unwavering in his resolve to cultivate the minds of others but by 1892 Lalita was not prepared to lead a life of continuous self-negation. Lalita becomes victim of many physical and mental ailments. “Mrs. has been suffering from premonitory symptoms of consumption... she is doomed.”¹²³ As her physical condition further deteriorated her mental health also suffered. She became a patient of “Monomania” and was admitted to a sanatorium at Sion.¹²⁴ Lalita’s illness forced Govardhanram to examine the cause of her hysteria – this he does with clinical detachment.

“Cure for wife’s hysteria:

1. Cause of hysteria: *Prolonged and compulsory* abstinence from natural tendencies and sentiments and sickness and agitations of soul and frequent irritations, etc , etc., caused by a sense of enduring injustice and ill-treatment, etc.
2. *Result:* Bodily hysteria, and abnormal and incessant irritability and pain of mind, and melancholia and hypochondria, etc.
3. *Remedy applied:* A general abstinence on my part from contradicting her and allowing free scope of her *will* and *frenzies*... and showing sympathy for her real and imaginary miseries. .
4. *Shortcomings in the remedy:* I sometimes lose patience and temper, and sometimes fail to study her mind and mood.”¹²⁵

Despite care and medical treatment her condition progressively worsened, she was faced with imminent death. “Poor Lalita! Your life is hanging upon a most apparent uncertainty. Most people affected as you are, die after lingering pains.”¹²⁶ The possibility of Lalita’s death compels Govardhanram to articulate his own guilt: “Poor beloved Lalita, sweet sharer

of my cares, brave bearer of the heavy burdens that I have placed on thy frail personality, in this way am I bound to witness thy pangs and smoldering...¹²⁷
The Great Will willed otherwise and Lalita survived.

But, after this point Govardhanram gave up his efforts to cultivate Lalita. After her illness, Lalita acquired the self-confidence to rebel against the regimentation imposed by Govardhanram. He indicates that she used to frequently taunt him: “You taught me from childhood to love and serve your people; how do you ask at this stage and age, to be indifferent to their opinions and remarks, and their wounded feelings, simply on the ground that you agree with me in thinking they are mistaken? Why should they mistake? How can I change my nature now? My only way to bliss is to see them love me whatever the sacrifice.”¹²⁸ Govardhanram’s philosophy had the resources to contain such rebellions. Centred as it was in the ideals of continuous self-negation, without an accompanying awareness of this sacrifice, his philosophy made Govardhanram respond to Lalita’s questions in a characteristic manner; “If she did not feel the sacrifice, she should be right.”¹²⁹

Govardhanram may have been able to respond philosophically to Lalita’s taunts but Lalita’s life, her “failure” to be the embodiment of consumption, her illness – hysteria which pushed her to the margins of insanity – posed fundamental questions to Govardhanram’s philosophy of consumption and his declared mission to cultivate minds and souls of his countrymen. Neither Govardhanram nor his philosophy had a creative response to this. His only response was silence. After his self-chosen retirement and final shift to Nadiad from Bombay to complete his novel and dedicate himself fully to contemplation regarding the fate of his country and countrymen, there are no references either to Lalita’s consumptive lungs, mental illness or her being “Family’s Angel.”

When Lalita entered Govardhanram’s life she was around twelve years old. She had received her primary *sanskara* – for Govardhanram that was “ill-breeding” – from her natal home. Her mind was not a *tabula rasa*, it was

perhaps difficult to impart a completely different world-view to her. And as Lalita herself so accurately posed the question: “Is it possible to divert the branches of the tree at the fag end of their growth without breaking them?”¹³⁰ Moreover, Lalita was after all Govardhanram’s wife. Given her proximity to Govardhanram she had the possibility of recognising contradictions between his world-view and his attempts to actualise them in his own life. As a wife she had the space to contest Govardhanram at a personal level, her status as partner in rituals and a partner in conjugal relationship also gave her routes to escape from Govardhanram’s totalising gaze.

In 1881 Lalita gave birth to their first child – daughter Lilavati. In 1885 Govardhanram started writing *Sarasvatichandra*, at the same time Lilavati’s education began. Govardhanram assumed total control of her education and upbringing.

In Govardhanram’s project neither chance nor *Lila* had any play. Each action was to be based on proper study and intense reflection. This “obsessive concern for clarity” is also reflected in the detailed curriculum that he worked out for Lilavati’s education. Govardhanram believed that the *sanskara* of any individual is a sum total of accumulated *sanskari* of her / his *snagotra*, the *sanskara* imparted at the natal home and the individual’s own philosophy of life. Govardhanram did not have any control over Lilavati’s accumulated *sanskara* but he was determined and duty bound to impart all those values to her, which formed the core of his own philosophy.

Govardhanram believed that keeping girls completely unlettered was both a sin and a curse. His wisdom told him that education without a clear aim could be dangerous, especially for girls. To arrive at a decision regarding Lilavati’s education he formulated a guiding principle: “The decision must be made after considering the in-law’s house, mental capacities of the girl and her future prospects.”¹³¹ He defined, specifically for girls, the role of education: “In the dark wintry night that this world is, there is no protection, support and light against the piercing blizzards comparable to good knowledge, to guide the helpless girls on the righteous path and give them warmth and solace.”¹³²

Lilavati was admitted to a girl's school in Zaverbaug (Bombay) at the age of three. Govardhanram soon realised the narrow vision of such institutions and its futility in Lilavati's education. She was taken out of the school after a few months and "keeping in mind her age, sex and body appropriate facilities were created at home for her play and enjoyment."¹³³ She was never to go to a school after this. This brief stay at a girls' school was to be her only excursion to the world outside – before her marriage – without the ever present gaze of her father.¹³⁴

Govardhanram was seized by a sense of urgency about Lilavati's education, which he wanted completed before she was married and sent to live with her husband as he very firmly believed that there were too many obstacles in the path of education once a girl starts living with her husband.

Initially, Lilavati was tutored in basic literacy in Gujarati. Govardhanram was conscious of the fact that his child was destined to live through the 'drama of transition' and hence, she must be systematically exposed to both traditional wisdom and knowledge systems of India as well as Western education. A private tutor was hired to teach Lilavati basic Sanskrit and English. She was taught Prof. Bhandarkar's *Sanskritmargopadesika* and the English 'First Book.' Once she had acquired basic knowledge of Sanskrit, Govardhanram appointed Shastri Jivram Lallubhai (later Professor of Sanskrit, Elphinstone College, Bombay) to educate her in Sanskrit literature and *shastras*. Before giving the responsibility of his daughter's education to him Govardhanram reminded Shastri of his obligations and the goals of knowledge: "Shastriji, Lilavati is destined to live in a foreign environment. Neither I nor her mother will be able to guide her in good and bad times. Moreover, how are we – worldly beings – to provide her with wisdom? So, if you give her knowledge, give that type of Knowledge which will be a good friend of her intellect and constantly guide her, wherever she may be, on the right path."¹³⁵ They decided to combine the knowledge of literature with that of the *shastras* because, "Literature is useful in invoking and tempering higher desires and *rasas* of life while, development of the frail intellect requires the support of the *shastras*."¹³⁶

She was too young to be exposed to *Shringara* hence, together they selected those parts of the texts which did not have *shringar* as the dominant *rasa*. Shastriji taught her Brithihari's *Nitishataka*, Aryashrenishvara's *Chandakanshik* and the fourth part of *Shakuntal*. While she studied the *Savitri Natak* on her own, at a later stage she was allowed to study other parts of *Shankuntal* herself. Shastriji also initiated her into the understanding of the *shastras*. Lilavati was taught *Lagbutark Kaumudi*, *Ishavasya* and *Ken Upamsbadas*, the *Bhagvad Gita* and *Panchikaran*. As Lilavati went deeper into the Sanskrit tradition, she became disinterested in English education. Govardhanram allowed her to discontinue her English studies. In order to make sure she did not remain completely ignorant of Western life she was given Karsandas Mulji's *Travels in England* (in Gujarati). To familiarise her with societal issues she was made to read a daily, *Gujarati* and some other journals. Through such total education "the emotional and intellectual core" of her life was formed.¹³⁷

Govardhanram was aware that the prevailing social consciousness was inhospitable for a girl who was learned but did not have any house-keeping skills. Therefore, along with the training of her mind she was initiated into the intricacies of house-hold work. "In this training her mother was made her teacher. It is always desirable that a mother should initiate a daughter in this work because, this training demands love and delicate tutoring while, at the same time, the teacher should have the right to punish. There is no other person who inspires the same level of confidence in a child as compared to her mother."¹³⁸

From a tender age Lilavati was given the responsibility of cooking for the entire joint-family of twelve or thirteen members. Lalita and other women of the house were given strict instructions not to interfere in her work. Lilavati's mornings were spent doing the house-hold work while, the rest of the day was devoted to studies.

Lilavati's education was comprehensive. No area was left untouched. So complete was Govardhanram's involvement with Lilavati that he neglected his

two other daughters, Jayanti and Jasu, and also son Ramaniyaram's education and upbringing. In the later years he often used to lament the fact that in his own preoccupation with his literary and professional activities and total involvement with Lilavati he had totally neglected his other children, including the son. Govardhanram notes that even Lilavati had noticed the wide gulf which separated her from her brother and sisters. She even questioned Govardhanram on this and his meek defense left her unsatisfied.¹³⁹

Lilavati was engaged to marry at the age of three or four. While choosing a husband for her, Govardhanram went against the established norm of his caste of choosing a family from his own native town Nadiad. She was engaged to Himatbhai; third son of Manilal Gangashankar of Petlad. Govardhanram's family was against Lilavati's betrothal to an impoverished and indebted family. But, Govardhanram was uncompromising and argued that even his own family was indebted at the time of his marriage to Lalita but her parents posed complete faith in their ability to overcome the crisis. He argued, that they had no right to reject Manilal's family on grounds of indebtedness.¹⁴⁰

Lilavati's marriage to Himatbhai took place in 1891, when she was twelve years old. Her marriage at this tender age irked him. He finally decided to go ahead with the marriage. He reasoned that her happiness had to be sought in the existing social structure and this marriage was necessary to achieve that.¹⁴¹

The process of her education continued even after she was sent to live with her in-laws. Both Govardhanram and Lalita wrote frequent letters to her, in which they counselled her in *Grihni Dharma*. Lalita wrote: "You should not differentiate between the natal home and house of your in-laws... As long as you differentiate between the two families you shall never be happy. Therefore, it is your duty to consider them as your own and worship them like Gods. You once asked me who was virtuous? Virtuous is one who considers the in-law's house as her natal home and who treats all members – whether young or old – with utmost respect."¹⁴² Father Govardhanram urged her to follow the ideal and noble path of Gundsundari. "Gundsundari was surrounded by all types of

people and she made all of them her own through her *miti* and cleverness. Keep her in mind and follow her example. Notwithstanding the character of the others we should always be good and virtuous because, ultimately *Dharma* always emerges victorious.”¹⁴³ He reminds her of the education and wisdom that he has given her; “Make your mind so strong with the help of your knowledge that, the unhappiness of this world does not generate any remorse in you.”¹⁴⁴

Lilavati made this philosophy of life integral to her existence. She followed each tenet as the truth itself. Govardhanram lists many examples – and not without great satisfaction and some degree of pride – to prove that Lilavati had been worthy of all the knowledge that he had given her and that she had internalised completely, this knowledge and the principles of consumption.

Some rumours regarding her ill-health and unhappiness prompted Govardhanram to write a rather concerned letter to her. In reply Lilavati reminded her father of his *svadharma*, suggesting that it was his *dharm* not to be concerned about the well-being of a married daughter living with her parents-in-law. She quoted a verse from Govardhanram’s own poem *Snehmudra* to remind him that when a bird leaves its nest, it flies on its own. Similarly, a girl leaves her father after her marriage and is on her own. She further reminded her father of a verse in *Shakuntal* in which Rishi Kanva says that a girl is another’s property and the father is relieved by returning her to her husband.¹⁴⁵ “My sweet child admonished me in my own words and pointed the way to my happiness.”¹⁴⁶

By reminding her own father of his *svadharma*, Lilavati showed that she had internalised her education. Govardhanram notes many instances to reinforce that she lived her life in accordance with the two basic tenets of the philosophy of consumption: *Yajmandharma* and *Manojnadharma*.¹⁴⁷

Govardhanram’s success in creating an embodiment of the principles of consumptive virtue through Lilavati was complete.

A writer can bring his literary creations to an ideal end but life is never so kind.

Lilavati was living in Junagadh, which witnessed a series of epidemics. Her parents repeatedly asked her to join them in Nadiad. But, Lilavati refused to leave her in-law's house till she had nursed every member of the family. When Lilavati finally reached Nadiad it was too late. She had "consumed" herself through self-inflicted privation. She was diagnosed as suffering from the disease of "consumption", Tuberculosis. She refused to blame any person or even her fate in the face of imminent death. While reassuring her mother that she had fulfilled her *grihadharma* she said: "Mother, in those days of fever epidemic there were only two possible outcomes. If I had pampered and loved myself and not cared to nurse others, someone else would have lost life. But, I did not do so, and I do not care what fate awaits me now. Either I could have saved my life or someone else's life and it is desirable that I lose my life."¹⁴⁸ Lilavati, the embodiment of consumption, sacrificed her life. Govardhanram wrote; "Lilavati! By following the righteous path of *Dharma*, as suggested by your parents you sought, like Nachiketa, death. And death shall give you your fulfillment."¹⁴⁹ Lilavati died at the age of twenty-one, on 8th January, 1902. It is perhaps not a coincidence that two projects which had taken complete hold of Govardhanram's being ended almost simultaneously. He completed the fourth and final part of his novel *Sarasvatichandra*, which was published in 1901.

Govardhanram did one final act of his duty towards the sacred memory of Lilavati and his country. He wrote her biography, *Lilavati Jivankala*. Even this final act was done not to glorify her memory but to place before the society the story of an ideal life. "I am not writing this book to glorify you. But, I feel that your life, your philosophy and your actions have a message for the society. You are the real author of this work."¹⁵⁰

One question must be asked: Who or what was responsible for Lilavati's tragic and untimely death? Father Govardhanram, who assumed complete control of her life and tried to create a real embodiment of his philosophy?

Can he be held responsible? Or was it his philosophy which demanded negation of the “self” responsible? Or should we hold Lilavati’s husband and his parents responsible? Or was it the will of the Great-Will? *Lilavati Jivankala* does not provide any answers. As the historian, litterateur and a perceptive commentator of Govardhanram’s literary efforts Prof. B. K. Thakore observes, there is not a single mention in Lilavati’s biography of any marital discord or conflicts with her parents-in-law.¹⁵¹ According to him “Lilavati’s problems were external, and the nature of this external problem can be summarised in one word, Poverty.”¹⁵² It is extremely difficult to agree with Prof. Thakore’s conclusion. This conclusion is negated by Govardhanram in *Lilavati Jivankala*. It is true that Lilavati’s parents-in-law were in debt, but it is not true that Lilavati died due to lack of proper medical attention. Her treatment was done at Govardhanram’s house and he had not spared any effort or money on Lilavati’s treatment.¹⁵³ Therefore it is very difficult to hold an external factor like poverty responsible for her death. The answer must be provided by Govardhanram. He was not insensitive to Lilavati’s pain and suffering. Although this concern surfaces in *Lilavati Jivankala*, Govardhanram has not been truthful to himself while writing this. There are two reasons for this. (a) This book was meant for public consumption and Govardhanram was not wont to publicly display his emotions and feelings, (b) The stated objective of the text, that of placing before the society a picture of an ideal life also defeated any display of his own self on the part of Govardhanram.

We must turn to Govardhanram’s *Scrap Books* to understand his real emotions. Initially Govardhanram is tempted to attribute her pain and suffering to the desire of the Great Will. “My best, Sweetest, meekest, wisest and most patient child, who has done nothing in this life to deserve this situation, a situation which can only be accounted for by a speculative desire of Providence to kill her, or to test or toughen the ‘Philosophy’ of which alone her education and wealth consists.”¹⁵⁴

This attribution to the Great will was only temporary. He feels that neither Lilavati’s husband nor the parents-in-law deserved to have a noble soul

like Lilavati in their house. The restrained emotions expressed in *Lilavati Jivankala* find a free expression in his *Scrap-Book*, where there are repeated references to the ill-treatment, agony, and prolonged suffering that, she was subjected to by her parents-in-law “Her services were not only accepted without the slightest effort at limiting her struggle to serve them, but she was taunted for her groans and complaints, which she could not have made except in extremities. Her complaints were belittled, she was allowed to pass latest hours of a coldest winter on a damp ground floor, working to do them superfluous service without being relieved. And when she had fever and shiverings and was in need of warm blankets to cover her, nobody looked to these things. She lay so, listening to talks with hard words about her making too much of her body.”¹⁵⁵ He does not see any escape from this situation. If she were to live, she will have to go back to her husband. Only death can save her from this misery. He secretly desires her death.

“Not being able to see how the girl can be happy by living with such people as those at her husband’s, I have never been able to persuade myself to offer a single prayer for her life, and all that I could do in my affection, which cannot bear the idea of her death, has been to request the Great-Will to do what is best for her welfare, and for his inscrutable objects, or to make her live *provided* she is destined to be happy by living”¹⁵⁶ Blaming others might have given temporary solace to Govardhanram the father but the thinker in him is not convinced. He knows that the final decision regarding Lalavati’s marriage was his and he had gone against both the norms of his community and express wishes of his family while taking this decision. He gives a long, agonising justification for his action.¹⁵⁷ Such post-facto wisdom does not lessen his burden. His search for the truth finally leads him to the realisation: “I am responsible.”¹⁵⁸ The realisation invokes in him a strong feeling of having sinned “I have to thank myself for my having committed this inexplicable *sin* against my poor child, by choosing for her an unsuitable family.”¹⁵⁹ With her death his feeling of having committed a sin takes hold of him. “At 5.30 p.m. yesterday my poor Lilavati died after a stainless, spotless life of suffering. She was a martyr to the cause of our Hindu Social System, to her father’s exercise of his power

of disposing of her in early marriage with reform modification and to the services she rendered to her mother-in-law and her father-in-law.¹⁶⁰ Now his expiation and atonement can lie only in “realising my faults and weakness, and my sins against her life and merits.”¹⁶¹ He also concludes that “her soul and holiness were superior to *mine* and to that of every other person I see about me.”¹⁶² Only one idea gives him solace; “I can only feel proud to have had a child like this during my worldly sojourn, rewarded at the idea that I had the privilege of looking after the education and elevation of so aspiring a soul.”¹⁶³ His search for atonement leads him to examine the education and “elevation” of her soul. “In Lilavati’s life, I and her mother always taught her the way to do her duty to her husband and his family, and to seek reward and consolation in the idea of Duty. She was quite equal to her task and her body paid for it.”¹⁶⁴ He continues, “and with the philosophy and sweetness that her education and innate powers were able to develop in her, her life became one of martyrdom, among other things, to her own very high sense of duty, in which point she outdistanced not only me and mine but all the characters that I have been able to spin out in my books.”¹⁶⁵ In the opening lines of *Sanskarkala-Shodashi* a long poem on Lilavati, Govardhanram laments: “I had conceived a Gunsundari in my head. In real life I fathered you, a better version of Gunsundari. You did penance like Gunsundari but unlike her, did not enjoy the fruit thereof I produced a thesis, you sacrificed your life to prove it right!”¹⁶⁶ Having realised that it was his education, his philosophy which was the real reason for Lilavati’s pain, suffering and death Govardhanram is forced to re-evaluate his project of cultivation of minds and elevation of souls. “My daughter Lilavati suffered because of high virtues and would have fared better if she had not got the virtues! Is it right then to teach these virtues to our daughters? So many people tell my wife that she has killed Lilavati by making her virtuous, the charge comes home more to me. Is a parent right in educating his children in this way *at their cost?*”¹⁶⁷ He questions the idea of virtue itself. But he is not ready to give up either his project or his faith in the essential goodness of virtue. He, for the final time reasserts the validity of the principles of consumption: “This question must be answered in *affirmative* for people like *myself*; my children, like their father and mother, have been educated in virtues *irrespective of its*

consequences."¹⁶⁸ Lilavati failed in her death as well. Even the loss of a part of himself could not force Govardhanram to realise the destructive consequences of endeavours aimed at human and social engineering.

The power of his vision did not allow Govardhanram to abandon his project but, with Lilavati's death the creative self of Govardhanram died. He could not create any work of literature of any merit after Lilavati's death.¹⁶⁹ He lived his final years lonely and miserable seeking solace and strength from Lilavati's memory. "No misery that will reach me now can be higher or more excruciating than that borne by my Lilavati, and I can do no better reverence to her sacred memory than by walking in her gentle and yet, firm, steady, virtuous, and heroic footsteps in facing any circumstances that may befall me. Her sweet and lofty virtues be my divine beacon-light in my mundane struggles henceforth! May her example inspire my soul and draw me closer unto hers wherever and whatsoever she now may be!"¹⁷⁰ He died on January, 4th 1907 after a long illness.

Govardhanram – while commenting about the high point that Gujarati poetry had achieved during the Seventeenth century through Akho, Premanand and Samal, observed that the vocation of a writer is to expand the human nature by placing before the people "purer and higher ideals of social life" in a "beautiful and ennobling" manner. Akho, Premanand and Samal could achieve this only because they were "above the society in which they live."¹⁷¹

Govardhanram sought to achieve similar results through *Sarasvatichandra*. His idea of influencing contemporary society was fulfilled, perhaps beyond his expectations. "The educated youth of Gujarat lived in the dreamland of Sarasvatichandra, Kumud and Kusum... No other book of fiction has made so powerful an impact on its contemporaries as *Sarasvatichandra* has made."¹⁷² For over hundred years *Sarasvatichandra* has remained the canonical text of Gujarati literature, perhaps no other work of fiction has been able to match its range of concern or popularity. "No other event, before the arrival of Gandhi, had so

captured the imagination of the society and had succeeded in moulding the minds of the people on the path of the moral – civilised conduct as this epic novel.”¹⁷³

Govardhanram’s attempt was to create a new moral universe for the emerging middle class. As mediators of colonial cultural encounter, this emerging class experienced deep uncertainties about the old order and felt ambivalent insecurities about new modes of thoughts, conducts and cultural ideals creating permanent disjunctions in their public and personal lives. Largely due to industrialisation, distance between the public and domestic spheres increased as men came in contact with new ideas and ideologies. This group was in search for new models of thought and conduct which would provide some sense of permanency in times and transition.

Govardhanram provided them with a new ideal through his “graduate hero.”¹⁷⁴ This graduate hero has become a dominant thematic category for Gujarat Literature.

This acute awareness of having to provide anchors introduced caution in Govardhanram’s enterprise. He is willing to question the assumptions and normative principles underlying social and political institutions, he is also willing to reject their moral superiority in some cases. Nevertheless, he does not consider it desirable to posit options which might fundamentally alter the old and introduce new anxieties. This caution is quite evident in his attitudes towards widow remarriage.

This overwhelming desire to provide anchors to society led him to the creation of a new idealised woman – The Domestic Angel.¹⁷⁵ Govardhanram’s personal life and the novel reflect a remarkable engagement with women and femininity. For a major part of his life he tried to “educate” and “raise” the virtues of his wife, Lalita. So complete and intense was his identification with his daughter Lilavati that he neglected his only male child Ramaniyaram. The novel *Sarasvatichandra* is anchored in the characters of women that he created –

Gunsundari, Kumud and Kusum. What could be the reason for his intense encounter with womanhood?

For Govardhanram tradition was to be “the bedrock of social reconstruction through much of this transitional phase, when two civilisations confronted each other.”¹⁷⁶ In times of transition women and womanhood became ideal embodiments of traditional virtues. Govardhanram introduced to Gujarat the Victorian ideal of “naturally virtuous woman.” Govardhanram established the moral and cultural superiority of women over men. Colonial cultural consciousness, had for many, deep insecurities regarding their own traditions. In Govardhanram’s moral vision, it was through women that harmony and virtue, in both family and society were sought to be achieved. In such times women became the sites where the conflict between tradition and modernity was being played out. Govardhanram’s philosophy of consumption also place additional burden over women. Consumption with its emphasis on continuous self denial, without an accompanying sense of sacrifice, and valorisation of pain as an ideal to be sought to further one’s consumption, crushed womanhood.

Govardhanram sought to create such an ideal woman in his life, as well as in his fiction. When his “domestic angel” – Lalita – became hysterical under his regimentation and gathered courage to question his ideals he made another attempt through Lilavati. Little did he realise that it is impossible to create one ideal woman through two lives.

Govardhanram’s vision demanded and got heavy sacrifices from women. Lalita paid it through her hysteria, Gunsundari through her consumption, Kumud by submitting her desires to a higher ideal of ascetic renunciation and Lilavati through her life. Govardhanram’s vision was essentially a patriarchal vision, which by valorising “natural” qualities of women induced them to martyr themselves.

One final question must be asked. What was the reason for the loss of Govardhanram’s creative self?

Govardhanram's creative self was anchored in his project of mediating civilisational processes shaping the future of his people. From the initial thought of writing discursive essays, to its culmination in a novel of epic proportions, it was this overwhelming need for mediation that kept alive his creativity. His creative impulse was tempered and guided by the frame-work of the philosophy of consumption. His real project was to create a society and people informed by principles of consumption.

This framework enabled him to deal with his own martyrdom in the joint-family. With its help Govardhanram could philosophically subordinate Lalita's illness and rebellion. He could even explain away Kumud's "choice".

But Lilavati's death brought forth the destructive potential of his philosophy and his project.

The loss of Lilavati was permanent. He could neither reconcile himself to her death nor explain it away philosophically as a will of the Great Force.

Despite his utterances about drawing solace and strength from his philosophy, one suspects that a part of his self developed a deep, fundamental mistrust about his philosophy. This loss of faith was fundamental. He did not possess either the courage or the energy to disown a philosophy which constituted the core of his self-identity. He was condemned to live with a self which was destructive. But his creative self was deeply aware and tormented by the destructive self. The creative self could not allow for another vision, another fiction. The loss of creativity, one suspects, was linked to the loss of faith.

NOTES

1. K. C. Pandya, R. P. Bakshi and S J Pandya (eds), *Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi's Scrap-Book* (Bombay: N. M. Tripathi, 1959), pp. 29-30, emphasis in the original.

The *Scrap-Book* for the period 1894-1904, edited by the same editors appeared in 1959. The *Scrap-Book* for the period 1904-6, edited by K. C. Pandya alone was published earlier in 1957. Hereafter these volumes will be referred to as *Scrap-Book* I, II and III respectively. Although the chronology of publication goes against this arrangement, this has been done for the convenience of citation as well as to maintain the chronology of their writing.
2. Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, *Sarasvatichandra*, four parts, part 1 published in 1887, part 2 in 1893, part 3 in 1897, part 4 in 1901. 18th edition, Mumbai: N. M. Tripathi, 1977
3. *Scrap Books*, op. cit
4. Govardhanram Tripathi, *Lilavati Jivankala* 1st published in 1905, 4th revised edition (Mumbai: N. M. Tripathi & Co, 1961)
5. This biographical section is largely based on Dr K. C. Pandya, *Sryut Govardhanram* (Bombay · N M Tripathi, first edition 1910, second improved edition 1965)
6. *Ibid*, p.54
7. *Scrap Book* I, P. 45
8. *Ibid*, p.123
9. *Ibid*, p.46
10. Ramprasad P. Bakshi, *Govardhanramnu Manorajya*, 2nd edn. (Bombay · N M Tripathi, 1992), pp.14-15. Translated from original Gujarati. Unless stated otherwise, translation from all original Gujarati sources has been done by me.
11. *Scrap Book*, I, p.148

12. *Ibid*, p.100
13. K. C. Pandya, opp. cit., p.63
14. *Scrap Book*, I, p. 146
15. *Ibid*, p.125
16. *Ibid*, p.52
17. *Scrap Book*, II, P.87
18. *Scrap Book*, I, pp.29-30. Emphasis in the original.

Govardhanram began writing the *Scrap Book* in January 1885, after he had achieved some stability in his profession as a lawyer in Bombay. He stopped maintaining them in November 1906. During this period he filled seven notebooks, all of which were written in English. Govardhanram had no intention of publishing them. After his death they passed through many hands and were finally published as part of his centenary celebrations. "So obsessive was this concern for clarity that, unlike most of his contemporary creative writers in different Indian languages, Govardhanram tended to avoid journalism."

Sudhir Chandra, "A Nineteenth Century View of the Hindu Joint Family: Notes from Govardhanram Tripathi's *Scrap Book*," occasional paper, Centre for Social Studies, Surat, p.2

19. *Scrap Book*, I, p.34
20. *Scrap Book*, II, p.176
21. *Scrap Book*, I, p.151
22. *Ibid*, p.27
23. Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, *Sarasvatibandha* part I, (Mumbai: N M Tripathi, first edition 1887, Eighteenth edition, 1977) English Preface, p.8
24. *Ibid*, Gujarati Preface, p.9
25. *Scrap Book*, I, p.31

26. *Sarasvatchandra*, part 3, Preface, p.3
27. *Scrap Book*, II, p.172
28. *Sarasvatchandra*, part 4, Preface, p 6
29. *Ibid*, part 3, Preface, p.4
30. *Ibid*
31. *Ibid*, part 4 preface, p.8
32. *Ibid*, p.9
33. *Sryut Govardhanram*, op. Cit , p.49
34. Sudhir Chandra, :A Nineteenth Century view of the Hindu Joint Family; Notes from Govardhanram Tripathi's *Scrap Book*, op. Cit., p 11.
35. *Scrap Book*, I, p.35
36. *Ibid.*, I, p.37
37. *Ibid.*, I, p.75
38. *Ibid.*, I, p.115
39. *Ibid.*, I, p.110
40. *Ibid.*, I, p. 114
41. *Ibid.*, I, p 128
42. *Ibid.*, I, p.120
43. *Ibid.*, I, p.119 Emphasis in the original.
44. *Ibid* , I, p.137
45. *Ibid.*, I, p 181
46. *Ibid.*, I, pp.184-185
47. *Ibid.*, I, p.186

48. *Ibid.*, I, p.238
49. *Ibid.*, I, p.262
50. *Ibid.*, I, p 121
51. *Ibid.*, I, p.263
52. *Ibid.*,
53. *Ibid.*, I, p.264
54. *Ibid.*,
55. *Ibid.*, I, p.266
56. *Ibid.*, I, p.265. Emphasis in the original.
57. *Ibid.*, I, p.266
58. Sudhir Chandra, op. cit., p.31
59. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 4, pp.145-165
60. *Ibid.*, p.153
61. *Ibid.*, p.164
62. *Ibid.*,
63. *Ibid.*, p.165
64. *Ibid.*, Part 2, p.110
65. Sudhir Chandra, op. cit , p.32
66. *Scrap Book*, I, p.51
67. Sudhir Chandra. *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 1992). P.23
68. *Scrap Book*, I, p.58
69. *Ibid.*, p 149

70. *Ibid.*, p.150
71. *Ibid.*,
72. *Sarasvatichandra*, Part 1, p 61
73. *Scrap Book*, II, p.43
74. *Ibid*
75. *Ibid.*, p.51
76. *Ibid.*,
77. *Ibid.*,
78. *Ibid.*, p.158
79. *Ibid.*, p.159
80. *Ibid.*, p.174
81. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 2. P.29
82. *Scrap Book*, II, p.84
83. *Ibid.*,
84. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 4, pp.41-94
85. *Ibid.*, p.46
86. *Ibid.*, p.76
87. *Ibid.*,
88. Sudhir Chandra, "Widow Remarriage and later Nineteenth Century Indian Literature," Occasional papers on History and Society, No. XXIV, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murthy House, New Delhi, p.30.
89. *Sarasvatichandra*, Part 4, p.818
90. *Sarasvatichandra*, Part 3, p.352

91. *Ibid*
92. Sudhir Chandra, 'Widow Remarriage and later Nineteenth Century Indian Literature'; op cit., p.26
93. *Scrap Book*, III, p 67
94. *Lalavati Jivankala*, op. cit., p.93
95. These letters were exchanged in 1906 Govardhanram had sent copies of *Lalavati Jivankala* and *Sarasvatichandra*, to Dayaram Gidumul. After reading these books Dayaram entered into this exchange. Out of the total eight letters Dayaram wrote five, while Govardhanram's response to them is contained in three letters
- The first two letters of Dayaram are undated. See for letter 1 to 5, *Govardhanram Shatabdi Granth*, op. cit., pp.60-81 and for letters No 6,7 and 8 see, *Sryut Govardhanram*, op. cit., pp 371-377.
96. Dayaram Gidumul to Govardhanram, letter No 2, *Govardhanram Shatabdi Granth*, p 61
97. Govardhanram to Dayaram Gidumul, letter No 3, dated 13 3 1906, *Ibid*, pp.61-67
98. Dayaram Gidumul to Govardhanram, letter No. 4, dt.14.3.1906 *Ibid*, pp.67-69
99. Govardhanram to Dayaram Gidumul, letter No 7, dt.26.3.1906, *Sryut Govardhanram*, op cit , p. 377
100. Dayaram Gidumul to Govardhanram, letter No. 8, dt.27.3.1906, *Ibid*.
101. Sudhir Chandra, 'Widow Remarriage and later Nineteenth Century Indian Literature', op. cit., p.29
102. *Scrap Book*, I, p.51
103. At many places in the *Scrap Book* Govardhanram draws parallels between his life and the novel; he compares his wife to his heroine and asks the daughter to follow in the footsteps of Gunsundari, his ideal heroine. He even draws conscious parallels between the two

His daughter Jayanti was betrothed at a tender age and this decision hurt Govardhanram. Two days after her engagement he wrote: “Curious coincidence! Jayanti betrothed on 25th, and I get the first proof of the second part of my novel on the 26th. The betrothal pinches me, and I compare myself to Vidya Chatura, who accepting in haste a woman’s arguments, betrothed Kumud to Pramad, and dropped all talk of Sarasvatchandra.” *Scrap Book*, I, p.93

104. *Scrap Book*, I, p.27, Emphasis in the original.

105. *Shreyut Govardhanram*, op. Cit , pp.16-17

106. *Hridayudtshatakam*, a long verse in Sanskrit was written in 1875. *Snehmudra*, which is an adaption of the former was published in 1889.

107. *Scrap Book*, I, p.167

108. *Ibid.*,

109. *Ibid.*, I, p.167-8

110. *Ibid.*, I, p.64

111. *Ibid.*, I, p.61

112. *Ibid.*, I, p.62

113. *Ibid.*, I, p.62-3

114. *Ibid.*, I, p.184-5 Emphasis added.

115. *Ibid.*, I, p.26

116. *Ibid.*,

117. *Ibid.*,

118. *Ibid.*,

119. *Ibid.*, I, pp.113-15

120. *Ibid.*, I, p.200

121. *Ibid.*, I, p.236-7

122. *Ibid.*, Emphasis added.

123. *Ibid.*, I, p.162

124. *Ibid.*, I, pp.166-8

125. *Ibid.*, I, p.182

126. *Ibid.*, I, p.166

127. *Ibid.*, pp.163-4

128. *Ibid.*, I, pp.224

129. *Ibid.*,

130. *Ibid.*,

131. See, Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, *Lilavati Jivankala* first published in 1905, 4th revised edition, 1961. (Bombay. N. M. Tripathi), pp.57-8

132. *Ibid.*

133. *Ibid.*, p.61

134. In fact, she was not unobserved at the school. Govardhanram's sister Samarthalaxmi was living next to the school and she kept a constant watch on Lilavati, *Ibid.*, p.60.

135. *Ibid.*, p.4 For details of Lilavati's education see *Ibid.*, pp.57-58

136. *Ibid.*, p.65

137. *Ibid.*, p.66

138. *Ibid.*, p.62

139. *Ibid.*, p.50-4. One incident captures this divide, once, while he was going to Bombay from Nadiad, Jayanti requested him to get for her a book on religious and ritual observances, *Somvar ni Katha*. After she left the room Govardhanram expressed his deep pain and his own sense of failure to his friend and relative Shri Chandrashankar Pandya: "I could not educate this poor girl and therefore

she has to ask for books like, *Somvar ni Katha* or else like *Lilavati* she would have been demanding excellent books.” K. C. Pandya, *Shriyat Govardhanram*, op. cit., pp.207-8

140 *Lilavati Jivankala*, op. Cit., p.16-17

141. *Scrap Book*, I, p.89

142 *Lilavati Jivankala*, op Cit., p.6

143. *Ibid.*, p.10

144. *Ibid.*, p.11

145. *Ibid.*, p.4

146. *Scrap Book*, II.230

147. Govardhanram defined virtue as consumption of self in order to feed the world, while vice was defined as feeding on the flesh of the world. The dharma of the virtuous is to be a *yajman* while those who feed on others are *atbuthi*. He had imagined his ideal characters as followers of *Yajmandharma*. The other quality of the virtuous is to understand even the unarticulated feelings and desires of others and conduct their lives accordingly. He calls its *Manojadharma*. He had attributed these qualities to the *Sadhris* of Sundargiri in the novel See *Lilavati Jivankala*, pp.24, 42-49.

148 *Lilavati Jivankala*, op. cit , p.28

149. *Ibid.*, p.29

150. *Ibid.*, p.3

151. B. K. Thakore, Prefare to *Lilavati Jivankala*, p.6

152. *Ibid.*, p.9

153. *Ibid.*, pp.25-34

154. *Scrap Book*, II, p.191

155. *Ibid.*, II, p.224

156. *Ibid.*, II, p.213. Emphasis in original.
157. *Ibid.*, II, p.223
158. *Ibid.*, II, p.191
159. *Ibid.*, II, p.216. Emphasis added.
160. *Ibid.*, II, p.220. Emphasis added.
161. *Ibid.*, II, p.228
162. *Ibid.*, Emphasis in original
163. *Ibid.*, II, p.228
164. *Ibid.*, II, p.224
165. Govardhanram to Janmanshankar Buch, *Lilavati Jivankala*, p.131
166. *Sanskar – Shodasbi*, published in *Lilavati Jivankala*, pp.133-155. The verse has been translated by Sonal Shukla. 'Govardhanram's Women', *EPIW*, October 31, 1987, PWS – 65
167. Scrap Book, II, pp.290-91. Emphasis added.
168. *Ibid.*,
169. The only work of consequence that he could write was *Lilavati Jivankala*. He returned to writing abstruse essays, the most important being *Dayaram No Akshardeh* which was published after his death.
170. *Scrap Book*, II, p.256
171. Govardhanram Tripathi, *Classical Poets of Gujarat and Their Influence on Society and Morals*, (Mumbai: Forbes Gujarati Sabha, 1894, Third edition, 1958), pp.33-34.
172. Mansukhlal Jhaveri, *History of Gujarati Literature* (New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi 1978); p.98
173. Vishnuprasad R. Trivedi, *Govardhanram: Chintak Ne Sarjak* (Mumbai: N. M. Tripathi, 1962), p.95

174. Sonal Shukla has beautifully captured the essence of this new ideal. “He has done extremely well in his studies. He is sensitive and generous but also somewhat haughty and aloof. He has a mission, but no job. He usually belongs to a wealthy family, but does not mind living in poverty, although towards the end he is usually comfortably placed all over again. The novelist and his heroine admire this greatly. Sarasvatichandra is the first modern Gujarati hero of this type.”
‘Govardhanram’s women’, *EPW*, October, 31, 1987, p. ws-63

175. *Ibid.*, pp. ws. 65-67

176. Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, op. cit., p.82