The previous chapter makes the protagonists realize their life through various transformations. These transformations take place through gradual progression of their life. As the flow of life teaches them various levels of changes, the fourth chapter transforms this stage into spiritual realization that lies as the final step for man. All these changes are attained from the beautiful union of man and woman in the sacred wedlock of marriage or union of hearts.

The Bliss of Life pictures life artistically revolving around the poet-musician Kshetrayya. He passes through life and struggles to attain God realization. This struggle is a gradual progression of an individual from a physical to a spiritual plane, fully surrendering to the will of God.

The writer Rama Sarma points out that this story is an imaginative reconstruction of Kshetrayya's life—a famous poet musician of Andhra region who writes padams and devotional songs. The theme consists of the legendary historical life of Kshetrayya who is a celebrated artist of the seventeenth century and about his quest for spiritual realization.
Kshetrayya belongs to the tradition of music composers like Chaitanya and others. Kshetrayya is earlier called as Varadiah and he is a young devotee of Muvva Gopala. The novel begins with Varadiah singing a song and Mohanangi dancing to that tune in ecstasy. Varadiah is attracted towards Mohanangi and it is seen in the following lines as.

"Varada enjoyed her company immensely. They had similar tastes they both belonged to the world of music and dance. But gradually as they grew to be man and woman, thoughts of love occupied their minds. Their study of Bharata's Natya Sastra and Bhanudatta's Rasa Manjah, gave them an intellectual, refinement and affinity."

Varadiah and Mohanangi feel isolated because of the social disapproval and are driven more to the side of God and become more devoted. Kshetrayya enters a new phase on Krishnashtami day, when he is blessed by Muvva Gopala to become the great padam composer, and to spread the message of love and devotion for God.

The life of an ordinary man become dull and drab to him. He surrenders himself completely to Lord Gopala and composes padams in praise of him. There is a transformation from a state of sensuous attachment to life and crosses into a state of spiritual realization. Varadiah transcends his physical longings and reached to an emotional perception of God. He communes with the Lord
God and attained a spiritual identification. His padams acquired a new melody, depth of meaning, passion and metaphysical supremacy. He attains a kind of mystic elation with the divine. He tells Mohanangi in the typical tradition of Madhura Bhakti:

> From now on I am the consecrated bride of Muvva Gopala and He is my lover. I have to woo him, please him, praise him and worship him through devotional songs. I have to celebrate His glory through padams noted for their literary excellence, musical quality and dance potential. This is my cherished goal.

The novel, not only expresses the evolution of the character of Kshetrayya but also the progression of his spiritual quest. This composer is exposed to a number of temptations of wealth, the luxury of court life and all its joys. Though he is exposed to all the pleasures of the world, Kshetrayya is unmoved and he takes all these temptations as fleeting incidents, irrelevant to his central quest, the spreading of the message of love, Madhura Bhakthi. Rama Sarma gives a Miltonic struggle and fortitude to his composer who stands temptations and who is tested in his life span. Varada, in his conversation with King Vijayaraghava says:

> God may choose to expose His devotee to a fiery test before He accepts him. The path of celestial glory is a difficult one. So God purposely puts man in the midst of temptations so that he may be tempted and tested and those who go through this process successfully become identified with God.
Varadhiah's first temptation comes from Kamala a dancer in the court of Golconda. But Varada's noble desire is to glorify Muvara Gopala through his padams. Varada understands that his life is not an ordinary life, like that of others.

I was not born to lead the ordinary life. I had to transcend its limitations and acquire a nobler one. Then you may say why I have not gone the way of those who have renounced the worldly pleasures. My life is dedicated to the glorification of Muvara Gopala. ------ Not as though He is in need of my praise, but I take it as my mission. God’s works and deeds have to be interpreted by His worshippers, and His message has to be communicated by His saints and prophets from time to time.4

Kshetrayya has attained a higher state of thinking, where the sense of ‘mine’ had vanished. He is unmoved at "the sights of fair damsels - - - -". He feels no dislike for the world around him. Varada is free from joy and sorrow. He is able to control his senses and has more understanding of life. His goal is to sublimate his desires. He wants to establish his right place with Muvara Gopala and become one with Him.

From Thirumala Nayaks court in Madurai, he proceeds to Kanchi where he is blessed with a unique experience with God and this affirms that he is the blessed one. One night he watched the Goddess leaving the place of Kanchi Varadaraja and thrilled by this vision he composes a padam.
From Kanchi he goes on to Thanjavur. He is faced with another temptation from a dancer Kalyani, in the court of Vijayaragava. Varada transcends the limitations of the self, of passion and of desires. For him the hollowness of the worldly glory is an unsubstantial airy nothing. He detaches himself from honours and rewards and all other material gains. He attains a stage where he feels that all the glory that comes to him belongs to Muvva Gopala. King Vijayagraghava declares that:

> You are a Kshtragna. You have attained the sum total of wisdom. You are one of the blessed few knowing everything, seeing everything perfectly. You have the bliss of life, the heavenly joy, and the spiritual enlightenment whereby you have annihilated the lower self in you. You have attained divinity.  

He wins the contest held in the court and is praised as a great composer of padams. He undergoes the final and crucial test in the court of the nawab of Golconda. Kshetrayya is asked to write fifteen hundred padams in forty days as a test to his superhuman poetic prowess. Kamala and ThulasI conspire against him and he accepts the invitation of Kamala and goes to her house. He is given a love portion, a practice, which is common in medieval India, to make the unyielding yield, to love. Mohana who keeps watch of Varada helps him with the help of Siddendra Yogi, to come out of the evil effect. He is saved just on time, to finish his padams, which is a challenge to his intellect. Kutub Shah wants Varadiah to finish the padams in a
stipulated time. Kshetrayya enters a deep trance of absolute communion with the Divine and attains an oneness, with enough power to finish the fifteen hundred padams in just one night.

He gets a divine awakening to visit other holy places like Bhadrachalam, Srisailam and Tirumala and returns back to Muvva, where he will be identified with the Divine. He returns to Muvva with Mohanangi and starts singing his padams with divine rapture in Muvva Gopala's temple, accompanied by the spiritual dance of Mohanangi on the Krishnashtami day.

The individual life of Kshetrayya which begins from Muvva ends in the same place where he merges with the divine, symbolically as a small light merges with the luminous glow of the divine “Mohana sees God in Varada and Varada sees God in Gopala. He for God only. She for God in him” Mohanangi’s bliss is the romantic life identified with Varada an idealization of love. Kalyani and Kamala refer to a physical attraction towards Varada. Kshetrayya’s bliss will mean identification with the Lord Muvva Gopala. King Vijayaraghava and Varada feel that, “we both agree that the higher plane of devotional love is achieved only through physical love. We take it as a gradational process.”
The author provides a very convincing locale and topography for Kshetrayya's journey through the various stages of his career as a devotional composer. The progress of his character from a stage of passionate love ultimately leads him to the divine love - the bliss of life. Rama Sarma employs myth taken from the background of his own village. The idealized man in this novel is larger than life itself. He has identifies himself through his padams, and gains universality. Varada is given an exalted position in this novel and his "quest gains an extension into infinity by being absorbed into infinity - the bliss of life".

Varada needs Mohananagi not only as his companion but also to dance his padams, since his padams become more effective when accompanied by music and dance, and Mohana needs him as her friend, guide and philosopher. In his early boyhood he is not free from bodily desires, he is not able to resist the temptation, to possess her physically. He leaves Mohana to conquer his desires and to compose padams expressing his 'Madhura Bhakthi' - the love of a girl for her lord. Varada's passion for Mohana transforms itself into a passion for Muvva Gopala. There is a gradual process of willing and subordinating the physical pleasures to a higher pursuit where we can achieve the bliss of life, the communion with God and identification with the Lord.
Professing about ‘Karma Yoga’ Varada says, “We have to do our duty, but we need not be unduly excited about the results we may leave it to God for He knows better when to give the reward for the work done by us.”9 This is in accordance with what Lord Krishna said to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita:

- - - In the great cosmic plan of action play your oar as a hero. Wake up to the reality of this world. Fight the battle of life. Fear nothing. Do not falter in your duty, at the same time be not a slave to duty either. Perform your duty for its own sake.10

Varada meets a Sanyasin at Rameswaram and a priest at Kanchi. He advises the Sanyasin to go back to life and accept life with all its limitations. A life lived in a normal way is a fruitful one. By gradational process and by steady detachment one will acquire the nobler self. The Sanyasin is asked to serve others and the service to mankind is service to god. The priest thinks that it is difficult to be detached. Varada tries to convince him about the importance of ‘Nishkama Karma’ by saying:

Human beings, as we are, we long for fruits. All our deeds are motivated by selfish desires. Even the love we show to others is selfish because we expect something in return. That is the worldly way. But man has to come out of that self, centeredness. He has to develop interests that keep him busy in the service of others, or in the devotion to God.11

This feeling of Varada, about work that has to be detached, is seen to arise from Bhagavad Gita and also Vivekananda’s view about
work. The greatness of detached work and its attainment is given
force by Vivekananda as:

Those who work without any consciousness of their
lower ego are not affected with evil, for they work for the good
of the world. To work without motive, to work unattached
brings the highest bliss and freedom. The Lord Sri Krishna in
the Gita teaches this secret of karma Yoga.  

Varada feels that God always has a divine mission in life.
The mission is that from time to time, God sends His saints and
sages into this world, to that they may remind human beings of the
ultimate reality and of the futility of earthly longings. Varada’s
conviction about the subtle points of intersection between time and
eternity, to an ennobling of human endeavour and man’s
renunciation of the physical and acceptance of spiritual intimations is
for a holistic order of the universe. Varadhaiah is called as
Kshetrayya and also sometimes as Kshetrajna, understood to be
taken from Gita to explain,

The literal meaning of Kshetra is that which protected
from perishing. The body of beings is called Kshetra because
it is saved from destruction to which it is prone. The word
Kshetra also means the field - - - - - - The body is therefore
the dharma Kshetra of the Jivatma. There is an intelligent
principle that not only resides in the body but also cognizes
and governs it. The sages designate the discerning principle
as Kshetrajna.  

Varada surpasses everyone, in his writing of padams. His
supreme creative imagination gives his padams a grand and sweet
texture, that of poetry with the mingling of music. His padams give the reader an aesthetic pleasure experienced by the writer and the reader. He explains this experience as:

"The aesthetic pleasure that is experienced is the affinity between the writer and reader. The writer first experiences the thrill and he communicates it through his writing. The poet enjoys the beautiful landscape or has certain pleasurable feelings to communicate. In all such cases the emotional experience is the same for the poet and his listener."\(^\text{14}\)

Life for Varada is the most pleasurable aspect of his living. He tastes the beauty of his life along with Mohanangi the dancer, who is not only a dancer, but also an aspect of life, that takes him to the highest ecstasy of life. From a normal understanding of the basic bliss of life, Varada slowly detaches himself, understanding that his mission of life is not just to see a woman dance his padams. He understands the inner urge that pulls him to a better and higher plane of attainment in life. He wants to attain spiritual enlightenment through his padams that is immersed in Sringara. Sringara may be of the pure type or the earthly type. It depends on how one approaches the aspect of love. Explaining about Shiva and Vishnu, Varada says that; "There is more of ethical idealism in the worship of Shiva, whereas the adoration of Vishnu inculcates Sringara."\(^\text{15}\)

In *The Bliss of Life* as in the *Pastures New* the divinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva the holy Trinity, that works on creation,
protection and destruction is understood through the characters. Explaining about the concept of Trinity and referring to the functional aspect of one single god - head having certain duties is understood from the lines as, “we attribute qualities to God as though he is austere or colourful. This is our own creation. We think that Shiva stands for asceticism whereas Vishnu symbolizes love and dalliance.”

There are different ways to attain the godhead, where supreme bliss of life can be attained. Varada selects a very pleasurable method, through music, to attain the godhead or supreme bliss. Man needs a means, in his valuable life to achieve his aim of spiritual attainment. Getting the bliss of understanding God is not possible for every human being. Man may be born into this world and end his life, without understanding his existence in this world. But saints and people like Varada can understand immediately, that his mission into this world is not an ordinary existence.

Varada enjoys his songs and he is blessed by divine dispensation to write padams, that can spread, “the philosophy of love, love for human beings, for all the creations of God and finally the sublime love for God.” The realization of God by Varada is unique and this unique sensation has to be given to many around
him, who do not know how to attain spiritual attainment. Referring to his songs, "was a dedicatory one and Varada is the Jeevatma trying to get identified with the Paramatma through devotional love."\(^{18}\)

Mohanangi is shown to the readers, as a beautiful dancer, who can excel in dancing Varada's padams with exquisite expressions, through the form of Bharatham. His padams acquire richness and beauty of rhythm, when Mohana dances to the tune of Varada's padams. His padams need a person like Mohana to inspire his mind to the physical love he feels towards Mohana. Later this aspect takes form to a higher aspect of reaching the grace of love towards God. Mohana represents pure love, but the other women who come across Varada's life represent the evil aspect of temptation. Temptations in one's life are a natural problem for everyone. To overcome temptations is part of man's attainment towards spiritual love. Life expressed by Varada is life experienced by him.

\textit{I do not believe in running away from life. I take it as escapism and defeatism. If life is unpleasant we have to face it and accept the challenge. We have to fight the battle of life. We cannot expect only good people to live in the world. We must be prepared to accept the wicked ones also for good and evil coexist.}^{19}\)

At first Mohana is unable to understand Varada's urge to go away from her. She suffers the separation from Varada, but
understands later that he is not born as an ordinary man. Life for Mohana attains a different perspective where she has to accept life of Varada to attain a higher plane. She too wants to assist his aim in attaining the higher plane of thought. The life of Varada and Mohana stand as an example for man and woman in this world, to undergo all the physical aspects of bliss, and then enter into a higher bliss of attaining God. To attain the higher level of life Varada and Mohana have to fight the basic feelings of existence. This fight to reach a higher plane can be seen in Bhagavat Gita where Krishna becomes the Kurushetra Krishna and explains that, "Mundane existence is a veritable warfare. Nothing here an earth is achieved without a fight. He who has not learnt to wage the war of life does not inherit anything here or hereafter. - - - Without self – preparation the warfare cannot be waged successfully."^{20}

Mohana, though a devadasi by birth is not willing to lead the life of her caste. She too wants to reach a higher plane of thought and living. She wants to live for Varada alone and become one with his padams. She longs for his love and physical bliss, as any other woman. As time passes by, Mohana understands that even her superior and sincere love and beauty cannot allure the divine love of Varada towards Muvva Gopala.
The life of Varada and Mohana though brought out in a mythological background, has the intensity of feeling and emotions seen in any work of art. This novel does not bear only the historical evidences as history predicts itself, but has a very moving approach to the theme and characters involved in it. This is because Rama Sarma has put into this work, the historical evidence, and has made the characters live the life of men and women of all ages.

The physical aspect of life, enjoyed by people in this world is the basic point of man to realize bliss of any kind. Even the great saint composer Varada is fully immersed in the act of enjoying Mohana’s physical beauty. Mohana’s bafflement is why a person who has read Vatsyayana’s ‘Kama Sutras’, can be away from her physical beauty. She wants Varada to posses her and allures him into saying,

*I may be a dancer, but I have decided not to lead the life of a dancing woman and surrender myself to the highest bidder. That life is not for me. I know I am for you and you are destined to be my lord. Muvva Gopala has gifted you to me. It is His grace that has brought us together. I love you, love you to madness.*  

Varada is thought to be an ordinary child even by his parents, and is asked to look after his properties. They did not consider him as a person meant for a higher spiritual attainment. Even his relationship with Mohana is considered as an ordinary love affair.
But to Varada, Mohana's presence is considered as, "I look at you as my companion, as an indispensable guide for my literary composition. I see in you the fulfillment of a dream, of my love for Gopala."²²

Mohana is to Varada, a means to understand what the ordinary level of bliss is, to reach the higher level of bliss. In life, man needs an instrument to become what he wants to be. This may be in the form of anything. As Gandhi needed the freedom struggle to become a Mahatma, Varada needs Mohana to differentiate the bliss of external and internal plane.

Life should be thought as a very precious one by everyone. Varada is one person who cherishes his existence and enjoys his very existence through his padams. Only a man, who has this enjoyment, is able to write exotic, heart rendering padams. He is more an optimist of life than a pessimist. Through his padams and through his life, he is able to lead everyman to understand and enjoy the bliss of God and the bliss of life. Varada understands that God is life. Accordingly Gita explains:

_God is Life Souls have emanated from God. So they attempt to assert life in the midst of the seeming extermination imposed on them by the play of Nature. Preserving life in the face of death and seeking permanence in the midst of perdition, are the workings of the will to assert existence._²³

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Varada is very faithful towards Mohana. Though they do not designate themselves as husband and wife, he is very sincere in his thought and action towards her. When Kamala and Kalyani lure Varada into physical pleasures, Varada is seen to keep his promise to Mohana stating that he will never forget her or take any woman in place of her. Varada says that,

"In thought, word and deed I am yours as far as this mundane life is concerned. But I see that I have a nobler and purposive life with a mission. I also feel that sublimation of desires comes only through participation in pleasures. I do not believe in renunciation. Through a gradational process of willing and subordinating our physical pleasures to a higher pursuit we achieve the bliss of life the communion with God and identification with the lord."

Varada's padams have a 'mystic elation' to the learned people and shows 'simple physical love' to the common man. In the days of kings and emperors, poetry and music flourished. Likewise, when Varada visits the courts, the ruling kings give him respect and adored him for his exquisite padams that appealed to the mind and heart. When man rises to a higher plane and attains fame, others look him upon with jealousy and hatred. This happen to Varada also who is not considered as a scholar among the groups of courtiers. A person, with a different thinking and action is shunned by society until he is lifted by a few to reach recognition. The kings, who received Varada with love and affection, give this recognition. The kings did not feel jealous but they praise any aesthetic work of art.
That is the age in which Varada lives and he is gifted to live in that period, when his work of art is considered divine.

Varada is seen to have a complacent behaviour, throughout the novel. He does not show his negative outlook or does he show his anger or hatred towards any human being. This greatness of his character is due to his understanding the better side of life that is always pleasant and sweet. The pleasant nature of Varada is seen to blossom out after coming into contact with the pleasant nature of Mohana who guides him throughout his goal in life. God knows that Varada is the apt individual who can carry the work of spreading the bliss of God throughout the country. The blessing of eternity for his works is a proof, for his blessings from God.

Varada undergoes the test of time and he is able to take temptations with equanimity of feeling. He cannot be a beast in any evil feeling towards anyone. Even the imposing women of the court are treated with all pleasantness of feeling. He can love all mankind with the same degree of love. Only Varada, who is not an ordinary soul, can achieve this love that transcends to every human being. He is one with God, to be holy and loving. This theory of a higher existence of man is found in Gita stating:

*Nature bears evidence to the truth that beings evolve surely, though slowly, from the low order of existence to the
high. Evolution of the body is complete at the human level. But there are stages of mental evolution to be striven after. Man has to perfect his mind in ethical and spiritual discipline. He should not therefore stagnate at the physical plane. His ideal in life is to emerge from the earthly existence into the divine. This is best effected by detachment from the mundane and attachment to the supra mundane.²⁵

Rama Sarma has attained a higher status of writing, by writing this novel. The novelist is proud to identify a divine saint from his village, who has attained spiritual enlightenment. This enlightenment is achieved, according to Rama Sarma, by the existence of living a life of the ordinary man. A playful childhood, carefree adolescence, and a step into the physical pleasures and understanding God, through higher pleasures, shows the evolution of life from the beginning to the end. The affirmation of life is seen to emerge from this novel.

This novel will live an eternal life because it has, as its theme the life of a simpleton, who achieves saintlyhood. The writing of Rama Sarma, to attain grandeur of style and appeal, beautifies the mere story of Varada. There is no evidence to know whether the real Varada has experienced such pleasures from Mohana, but Rama Sarma who has lived a real life, affirms that Varada would have enjoyed the real earthly bliss to attain heavenly bliss. The work of Varada has given Rama Sarma a clue to the mind and working of the real Varada. This novel throws out immense beauty of expressions and feelings.
Only in life, do writers get enough material to elaborate their views. This material is found in *The Bliss of Life*. The title itself shows that man can attain bliss from the start of his life, if he has the aim to achieve that bliss. Man should be the deciding factor for his life. Varada takes the decision at the proper time and this has given him a life to be remembered. It is in the mind of a man to affirm his life to a better state of living.

In this novel the author teaches man to live a life to the full extent and enjoy the bliss of the earthly life. He wants man to understand God, by living the life of a man and not run away from life feeling scared. The understanding of problems, good and evil can lead man to understand life in a better perspective and this perspective is the background for understanding God better. God wants man to live and come over to him through the slow process of living and not escaping. *The Bliss of life* is a novel that brings real bliss to the readers of today and tomorrow. The novelist Rama Sarma has achieved the bliss of life and also the bliss of spirituality. Another novel that attains realization from spirituality through travel and acquaintance is *Pastures New*.

*Pastures New* appears to be a travelogue, for it goes round places like KanyaKumari, Rameswaram, Varanasi and Tirupathi. These holy places have an influence on the Indians, irrespective of
any caste, creed or religion to which they belong. There is not much of description as is found in travelogues, but the description given, influences the reader as well as the characters involved. The background of these places creates an outlook on the socio-religious life in India. The Indian tradition also feeds, nourishes and shapes this outlook of an Indian. It brings about togetherness among the rich and the poor – communities and races for a better world.

The storyteller is one, Dr.Madhu and his wife is Mrs.Sarala. Dr.Madhur's close friend is Ramu (Rama Mohan) a professor and his wife is Suguna and they have a daughter by name Prema. Dr. Madhu's son is Mohan. Dr.Madhu and Ramu are classmates and they have a close friend, a lady by name Lalitha, who was once very fond for Ramu. Lalitha married in her own caste, though she loved Ramu, and her married life is an unfortunate failure. Her daughter is Vimala and she is happily married to Dr.Raja Rao. These characters are the characters that are very close to each other, and they get enlightened in their travel around holy places and also attain love that transcends all caste, creed and nationality.

The novels starts as a narrative by Dr.Madhu, of his visit to Kanyakumari, a place of confluence of the three seas, the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. He is not a man,
who is keen on washing away his sins in the waters of Kanyakumari. He is a rationalistic person, who is curious to see the beauty of nature that is a great influence on people and writers. He goes to the shores early in the morning like all others, but his purpose is that of a man with a quest for nature’s unimaginable grandeur of sunrise.

The sun rises, and the beauty is so ravishing, that even the waves that are quite calm, starts to dance with ecstasy. Dr. Madhu takes a dip in the waters and as he is coming out of the waters, he sees a woman, who is slipping and is about to drown. He catches her and pulls her out and is about to leave her, when she calls out to him.

He recognizes her as his collegemate, Lalitha and she is very happy to meet him. When they are discussing about their past, glorious life as students, Lalitha wants to know about Professor Ramu, whom she had loved. Dr. Madhu tells everything about Ramu, and how he is well settled in life and that he has a daughter named Prem.

Lalitha, the next day by accident, sees Ramu and his wife Suguna. She requests Dr. Madhu to introduce her into their company. Ramu at first is unwilling to have Lalitha amidst their company, for he is afraid of his past being revealed to his wife
Suguna. Dr. Madhu promised Ramu that nothing of his fears will happen, for Lalitha is a different woman, after her unfortunate married life. Then Ramu accepts to see her, and to his amazement, Suguna gets attached towards Lalitha, as if she is her sister. The four of them have a wonderful stay at Kanyakumari and they visit all the places around and enjoy wonderful sights of nature's beauty. But more than nature's beauty, they are extremely happy about meeting in a place like Kanyakumari, after all the years of varied experiences in life.

Lalitha feels that, in between her miserable life, her past memories of Ramu is giving her solace in life. She also feels that she is a gifted person to be one among them to travel, to attain spiritual enlightenment. She has more belief in the established doctrine of ablution in the sacred waters that will purify the body and the soul. Dr. Madhu respects the spiritual hope of men and woman, to absolve their sins and wait for a new world order, where equity and justice will prevail. Dr. Madhu rightly speaks out, that he is there in Kanyakumari to see for himself, "The Land's End with all its glory."

Dr. Madhu has a very happy married life, where his wife Sarala is the guiding star of their family. Ramu and Suguna are very understanding and Suguna always admires Ramu's intellectual
exuberance and his outlook of life that is unblemished and straightforward. Lalitha is the only person who has been tossed in the stream of life and she has the urge to fight back the troubles, without grudging, but thinks of it as her punishment for being dishonest to Ramu. Lalitha's view of life is that, "life is a pretty game. Sometimes we succeed, but very often we fail." 27

Lalitha's quest for a harmonious married life is attained in seeing her daughter happily married and settled in the United States of America. She even has an infinite happiness in seeing her friends Madhu and Ramu having a very harmonious settled life. Lalitha does not feel jealous of Suguna. They are all past their youth, where feelings of jealousy and hatred have no meaning of its own.

The men and women are very understanding with each other and one understands the other through their looks and even frowns. This aspect of an understanding harmony makes it easy for Lalitha to get sustenance from their unbiased friendship. The union of friends and their discussion of themselves show them as having a quest for the self and also a spiritual quest underlying their senses. The first phase of the novel shows the experiences of the two couples and Lalitha, who were apart, in different places, come close together for a different experience. The various stages of life has passed through their lives and these stages has given them enough
thoughts about their past, that lays its ground for the spiritual search within them.

This novel's in-depth study, will bring out the novelists quest for a social consciousness and vision of a future India, where it will stand an example for a new social order, as a way out of all the ills of life and society. On this view of the society having its play on humanity, Vivekananda said that, "- - - -society was to watch that a continual interchange of men and ideas took place, so that the circulation of the blood of thought should be regular and bathe the entire body of humanity."^28

All the friends plan to meet again at Rameswaram, another holy place renowned for its temple, where Lord Rama installed twelve famous Ligas of Shiva. Sita created a Linga of sand and Rama consecrated it. They are keen on taking bath in all the twenty-one theerthas in the hope of cleansing their sins, if there are any. This belief is seen in the thoughts of Madhu stating that:

"The temple fulfilled the spiritual quest of man for he felt that he was one with Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and a host of other saints from time immemorial who sought refuge in the temple and bathed in its theerthas for purification."^29

By sheer chance, Madhu meets his friend Gopal, a rich man, who has lost his son Kesav and his daughter-in-law in a road
accident. He does not put the blame on God, but accepts his son’s deeds to be the ultimation for his demise. Gopal is now on a pilgrimage to all the holy places, to get solace in religion and religious places. This makes him feel that even though the world is polluted with evil thoughts and deeds, religion is there to uplift the defected souls, and give these souls an understanding of life, here and after. Gopal’s views about the religious centers is that:

These religious centers may give me some solace. At least that’s a good thing in our country. In moments of depression and desperation we can visit these holy places and get sustenance. Despite degeneracy in ethical values we still have these temples, monumental edifices of sanctity that remind us of our glorious spiritual past.

The third phase of their meeting is decided to be at Varanasi. They all decide to meet at Ramu’s place. Dr. Madhu returns back to Tirupathi and is happy to be back with his wife Sarala. Sarala is also happy to see her husband safely back from Kanyakumari and Rameswaram and the episode of Lalitha’s drowning brings her joy. She also gives Madhu the happy news of their son’s return from England, after taking his Ph.D. in economics. Mohan had then gone to Madras to visit some friends and Sarala, intentionally has asked him to go over to Ramu’s place. Madhu is puzzled about her request and she explains that Mohan might like Prem and that there is the chance event of their getting married soon. Sarala is keen in getting her son married and she has a sort of predestined
knowledge about all these events to happen, as she wished. Madhu thinks his wife to have more commonsense:

*With her rich commonsense and unquestioned faith in God she had a way of doing things, of cautioning us about things to come. She had a mysterious way of looking into the future and I relied on her many a time for her guidance and unfailing support. She was the typical Indian wife who was ambitious for her husband and prayed for the well being of the family.*

Madhu left everything in Sarala’s hands. They wait for Mohan to give the consent and to know if he has anyone in view of marriage, for he has tasted the foreign culture. Mohan is of a different view, for he is more attached towards their Indian culture. He has understood the value of the Indian culture and its heritage after he could get a taste of the western culture. He understands the depth and meaning of our culture and appreciates its value and uniqueness. Talking about Mohan’s views on marriage Madhu explains that, “His life in London has made him a greater admirer of the Indian way of life. Some of our Indian young men after going abroad develop greater liking for all that is Indian.”

So their marriage is fixed and it is to be held at Tirupati. Ramu is at first doubtful of the arrangements at Tirupati. But Madhu assures him that all accommodations will be made and they need not have any misgiving about the arrangements Sarala gains enough strength and with all the vigour in her, makes the
arrangements perfectly. The marriage takes place with all solemnity, with the grace of Lord Venkateswara.

Ramu has to attend a conference at Puttaparthi. Madhu did not know anything about Sai Baba, and Ramu takes the initiative of explaining the Man divine to his group friends. Sri Sai Baba's quest in reviving our spiritual past and in introducing India's rich cultural heritage to the present generation is the aspect, which ignites Ramu, to praise Baba and his educational reformations. He wants Madhu to accompany him. Madhu say that, "Education without ethical idealism is no education at all." They feel that the quest in life for higher values can be attained only through education.

Ramu and Madhu discuss about Sai Baba's concentration on education, and his involvement, for a different system of education, different from the educational system of that day. They feel that:

- - - - One aspect, the utilitarian aspect of education. Unfortunately this is dominating our minds now. But we have an obligation to make our students useful citizens of the country. They should have some awareness of our culture and this aspect of our education this noble goal is sadly neglected by us. So Swami takes the challenging task of rehabilitating our education to suit the cultural and spiritual needs of the young men and women of our country. 34

The ladies also want to be a witness to the divinity of Sri Sai Baba. Lalitha had already met Baba and she could give in her views
of him as well. The unifying cultures of East and West, and the serenity that prevailed in those educational institutions, are a wonderful thing to be seen by all. They all wished to go and Ramu arranges for their stay and a personal meeting with the Bhagavan.

The bhajans of Puttaparthi seemed to unify all the people there, and it sort of manifested the oneness in divinity, Rama, Krishna, shiva, Sai as one and the only one. Bhagavan is worshipped all over the world and his faith transcends all human limitations. He is like "Christ in his unbounded love for mankind and is like Krishna, in his establishing Dharma in this world."35 His quest is directed towards the elevation of Mankind. Bhagavan is also referred to look "like a shepherd guiding the sheep and giving spiritual sustenance."36 This experience from the bhagavan is for them partly human and partly divine. This divine experience gives them a new light on love, that is supreme love, which transcends physical love. Love becomes universal and with this state of mind the group of friends prepare their travel to the next place of worship.

Mohan and Prem being married only then, wanted to go on a tour to Delhi and they are still enjoying the bliss of married life, just then begun. The others, consisting of Madhu and Sarala, Ramu and Suguna and Lalitha started their pilgrimage to Varanasi. Though their journey is very tedious, their expectations of a varied spiritual
experience make them bear with their troubles. A friend of Ramu, one Dr. Chari, who is very obliging in giving them accommodations, meet them at the station.

The next day they all have a dip in the Ganges River, the holy river, meant for purification of worldly sins. Lalitha is afraid of the water, but accompanied by Ramu, she feels an ecstasy, transcending her soul, and she is even willing to drown herself. The temple of Lord Vishvanatha is small but the pilgrims can touch the idol and pray with all their love and faith in him.

They meet Kumar a guide, who by chance, is a Telugu speaking man who had suffered a lot in his life. He is separated from his wife and the divinity of Lord Vishwanatha sees the true faith in him and makes his wife meet him at the temple itself. That shows that true faith in God has its own results. The couple is enjoying the bliss of reunion and their happiness is evidence to the needy and shows how real love of God, leads man to the bliss in life. Their stay at Varanasi is very exciting and while visiting the Banaras University they meet Mr. Narayanan Rao who is a lecturer in the University. He has a terrible blow in his love that almost resembles that of Ramu’s and Lalitha’s love failure. They console him and ask him to get married soon. He takes these people to visit Sarnath. Their visit to the temple gives them the realization that, “the quest for spiritual
knowledge could be visibly seen in all those who visited these holy places. It only meant that the time was ripe for a spiritual reawakening in India." Dr. Madhu feels that only a great saint like Vivekananda can rouse a spiritual regeneration in India. According to Vivekananda:

"To the great 'Discriminator.' (Viveka) by whatever path a man travels, the spirit ascends by a series of partial errors and partial truths, ridding itself one after the other of the vestments of slavery until it reaches the whole and pure light of liberty and truth, called by the vedantist Sat – Chit – Ananda (Existence, Knowledge, Bliss absolute). It enfolds within its empire the two distinct realms of heart and reason."

While they visit historically important places at Sarnath, they met an American couple, Dr. Smith and Mrs. Smith who are too eager to converse with Dr. Madhu and Professor Ramu. Dr. Madhu answers his question about the concept of the trinity:

"Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the Trimurti representing spirit essence have different qualities, Brahma represents the quality of Being, Vishnu thought power, and Shiva, the quality of Bliss, the beatitude of Nirvana. Brahma creates, Vishnu protects and Shiva destroys all that is evil."

Dr. Smith is questioning on Hinduism, Upanishads, Vedas and the Gita. Madhu affirms that the Gita has a profound influence on Hindus. Gita has suggested different approaches to the attainment of Moksha or Salvation. There is also the Hindu way of gradual non-involvement. Though man acquires wealth and material, he is
capable or should be able to get himself away from them. Life is only meant for moving from involvement to non-involvement and finally surrender to God. This is the main aspect of life taught to all human beings through Gita. Here it will be apt to quote Vivekananda stating:

He alone lives whose life is the whole universe, and the more we concentrate on limited things the faster we go, towards death. Those moments alone we live, when our lives are in the universe, in others; living in this little life is death, simply death, and that is why the fear of death comes. The fear of death can only be conquered, where man realizes that so long as there is one life in this universe, he is living — The apparent man is merely a struggle to express, to manifest this individuality, which is beyond----.  

The Smiths are very happy to be in that group of intellectuals who give them a good picture of Indian culture, tradition, religious and social thoughts with much ease and understanding. They are invited to Tirupathi by Madhu and his wife, for their next meeting is to be at Tirupathi and Mohan and Prem are also there, after their stay at Delhi, a place full of hopes for his educational value. His parents wanted him to be at Tirupathi or Madras, but Mohan feels the urge to expose him to a place that is bustling with new experiences and awareness. His parents understand that his mental capability has changed due to his education at England.

The group wanted to visit the hills, where Lord Venkateswara stands resplendent in his magnificent abode. Dr. Madhu’s experience
of the Lord is, "That was a mystic experience, just for one moment, I was one with the Lord in supreme bliss and some inner prompting told me that I had come to the journey’s end." 41

That revelation seems to be the truth because the group that travels to various holy places comes to Tirupathi as their journey’s end. That is their last place of travel and the experience of the lord’s grace fills up the ever-yearning souls with ever-lasting glory. Lord Venkateshwar has graciously manifested himself as an idol and that is because of his abundant love and infinite mercy for human beings. He is a reincarnation of Vishnu – as the myth goes to say. There is a controversy about the idol being that of Shiva and the Vaishnavaites under the leadership of Ramanuja, prove ably that it is a temple of Vishnu. It is said that the weapons of Shiva and Vishnu are placed inside the temple and in the morning the conch and the Chakra are found adorned by the Lord.

Even for Mohan who lives in Tirupati as the son of Madhu has to be given a rationalistic interpretation of God’s way or he has to have his own inner experiences. They all visit the temple of Lord Venkateshwar along with the new couple. They have a wonderful darshan and their happiness finds no bounds. The worship of Divya Manohara Murthi, with all the mythical complexities and profound meanings, give them a very moving experience of their life. This
inarticulate, individual experience, experienced by each one of them
is divine. It surpasses the prejudices of caste, creed, race or
religion. Dr. Madhu aptly says:

*Fundamentally human nature is the same east or west. In our ignorance or out of our ego we build a wall around us and create tensions for others and ourselves. Love begets love and in the world of love narrow prejudices and caste feelings do not exist at all.*

When the refuge is found in love, it sustains and promotes progress in the individual, the society and finally the world. It will become one, and unifying. A grand world with a new order will be found. The novel transcends the deeply felt convictions of the personal, domestic and social limits of the people. There is an insight into the mysteries and puzzles of life. Love that is an enveloping process that transcends into a world order, world citizenships and establishment of peace becomes a universal quest.

This novel has its own strength drawn from transcending the domestic and social limits of the everyday people. There is no temperamental incompatibility, the frustration, the despair of anyone, nor the social problems get any momentum as in Rama Sarma’s other novels. There is an inner quest of each character towards life, that is meaningful and harmonious and this harmony does lead them to get a clear insight into the workings of the spiritual awareness.
This novel does not predict any character suffering from any inward complex or conflict. The characters are willing to take up life as it flows. This novel seems to be a travelogue on the outer surface, for readers of light reading, but the quest of every character is clear for a better understanding of divine God. The quest of each character is shown with equanimity towards life, towards relationships, towards friends, towards people, met in various places, and towards understanding the supreme Force that guides the deeds of man.

The novelist, Rama Sarma has experienced every drop of his life and has given in his work the concentrated abstract of his experience. Life is the main, guiding force for Rama Sarma, to put into his novels, the greatness and the littleness of life. This novel gives a very clear understanding of the life of people living in India. From the beginning, the quest for something in every stage of man’s walk is pictured through his characters and their thoughts.

When the novel begins, Dr. Madhu is seen to quest for the beauty of nature to give him harmony of living and thought. After enjoying everything, man feels the urge to become lonely, to experience the oneness with God Almighty. Here again the thoughts of Vivekananda will prove true: “Religion consists solely of an inner life, and this inner life is a forest peopled by very diverse
fauna, so that it is impossible to choose between the kings of the jungle." 43

The characters of Rama Sarma have an inner life that forms the life of each individual. These individuals have their own quests of life in this world and the later world. After suffering from marital disharmony, Lalitha quests for marital harmony of her daughter and her friends. Madhu is happy to attain his life’s fill through his wife and feels happy about their true friendship that sails together, to attain spiritual harmony. Madhu’s feeling about life is that, “Life is what we make of it” Ramu is seen as a ‘Karmayogi’ and a very faithful husband who has the bliss of a married life.

Each character struggles in thought for a better place to live in. For that sort of a better place, they wanted man to be good and not evil, to attain domestic bliss, to emancipate women from slavery of thought and action, to suppress social evils like dowry system and caste system. The main aim of these characters is to go every step higher to reach the bliss of life, with all fulfillment of life. The universal law of life stands as a backdrop for Rama Sarma to sketch his characters according to his views. The evil prevailing in this world nauseates them, for they have all lived and thought of good things alone. Speaking of evil, Madhu says, “I often ask myself why in this sacred land where values of life are still respected and holy
places are still visited there should be evil minded persons, naked and unashamed of themselves."

As they pass from individual search of self to a higher plane, they find the goodness of a universal love that will be a better thinking for every man alive. This way of thought will make man forget his self and attain a higher self that attains Moksha; Ramu explains this universal love in his statement of Baba:

The centrality of his theme in all his discourses is love that is universal. Sublimation of desires, annihilation of animal instincts, ascendance from a physical a spiritual plane, these are some of the tenets for which Sai faith stands.

Talking about Baba and his personification as "Satyam, Sivam – and Sundaram", he also stands for 'Ananda'. The dip into holy rivers like Ganga signifies the purification of man and his deeds. These friends who wander to holy places for their holy sustenance follow the Hindu belief of man being purified of his sins after a dip into the Ganges. They want their sins to be washed away during their stay in this material world so as to attain a better place after death. This Hindu concept, of another place after death is what makes the pilgrims of India, rush to holy places like Rameswaram, Varanasi and Kasi for their purification of souls. They have the hope of attaining spirituality through experience of religious faith in God. By this realization they have a lift of their life to transcendence and
not to descendence. The divinity of every human has to be realized, experienced and exploited to the maximum extent. People from the west also come for spiritual sustenance and have glorious experiences in experiencing God's glorifying state.

Apart from Lalitha, marriage, among the friends, is a divine glory and life has its meaning through living the life of a man. Their glory in life is due to the sacrifice of their wives, who has equal capabilities, which are kept inert for the cause of their husband's upliftment in life. Their children are also given a happy life, where their starting is on the experiences of their parents who enjoyed harmony in their married life.

Every soul in this world has to attain its 'Moksha' through the sufferings and happiness destined by God. This suffering and happiness is the test for a man to be a good person or a bad person, before he realizes his mission in life. Every individual has his own mission in life. Everybody cannot become Christ, or Buddha but has his own life to live and achieve within his radius of living. According to Vivekananda:

Silently they live and silently they pass away; in time their thoughts find expression in Buddhas or Christs; and it is these latter that become known to us. The highest men do not seek to get any name or fame from their knowledge. They leave their ideas to the world; - - - They are the Sattvikas, who can never make any stir, but only melt down in love.
Born into this world as an innocent child, man acquires knowledge and truth through many means and through a number of people around him. Society is one among the instrument that shapes the thoughts of every individual. The cultural and religious background the nativity of a man, his friends, his profession, his wife and children, his religious belief, his realization at a particular stage of living creates the whole personality of a man. Man cannot live as a single entity. He is dependent on others for his outer physical sustenance in this world and for his inner sustenance of soul he depends wholly on God, who is the only supreme force to give him 'Moksha'.

The blend of life within each character may seem to be very light, but to bring every aspect of a man’s growth will have this sensitive blend of events known to every reader. The characters wish to immerse themselves, heart, soul and body into the waters of the Ganga, which is thought as God’s holy waters. Nature is God and the force of nature, is associated with God’s immense power, to flourish or to destroy. Through one of the forces of nature, created by God, they find an inner force to attain spiritual attainment and finally come to Tirupati that is called as an abode of Srinivasa in ‘Kaliyuga’.
They feel the end is at Tirupati and they finally realize their
destination in this world. From this realization of man, the next
chapter will show man's destination to realization arising from
marriage or the union of man and woman, physically and mentally.
2. Ibid, P.29
3. Ibid, P.69
4. Ibid, P.67
5. Ibid, P.99
6. Ibid, P.9
7. Ibid, P.104
8. Ibid, P.12
9. Ibid, P.69

15. Ibid, P.42
16. Ibid, P.42
17. Ibid, P.27
18. Ibid, P.27
19. Ibid, P.92

20. Swami Chidbhavandanda, *The Bhagavad Gita* – P .18
22. Ibid, P.12
24. M.V. Rama Sarma, The Bliss of Life P.31


26. M.V. Rama Sarma, Pastures New, (Madras, Emerald, 985) – P.1

27. Ibid, P.6

28. Ibid, P.84

29. Ibid, P.27

30. Ibid, P.38 – 39

31. Ibid, P.44

32. Ibid, P.55

33. Ibid, P.62

34. Ibid, P.63

35. Ibid, P.67

36. Ibid, P.65

37. Ibid, P.100

38. The Life of Vivekananda and the universal gospel P - 205

39. Pastures New – P.103

40. Romain Rolland, The Life of Vivekananda and universal gospel – P.253


42. Ibid, P.144