CHAPTER VI

"TOMORROW TO FRESH WOODS"
PASTURES NEW
The novel *Pastures New* presents the socio-religious life in India. In fact, it is a travelogue. It is a known fact that man is, basically a religious minded being. All religions have Gods of their own. The Gods' abodes, the holy places become the centres of attraction for all believers. People visit these holy places hoping that their sins would be washed away which is a common belief in every religion. It is the dream of every Muslim to visit Mecca and every Christian to visit Jerusalem at least once in one's life time. This faith is prevalent in India where the Hindus wish to visit holy places like Kashi. This custom has been there ever since the dawn of civilization. In ancient India, the Hindus believed that it was a bound duty for every Hindu to go on pilgrimage at some stage in life. This can be done at any stage in man's life, either at the beginning of one's marital life or in the middle age after fulfilling one's responsibilities or even in the old age, which is supposed to be the stage of renunciation.

In the novel *Pastures New* the narrative centres round a few holy places like Kanya Kumari, Rameshwaram, Varanasi, Prasanthi Nilayam at Puttaparthi, and Tirupathi, as has been mentioned in the 'Publishers note' on the book cover of the edition, mostly to create an authenticity for the socio-religious life in India and to show the abiding influence of these
places of worship on the rich and the poor alike. The novel also gives a graphic account of Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba and his leela in making thousands of human beings wholesome and ennobled.¹

The title of the novel seems to have been inspired by the famous line from Milton’s Lycidas, ‘Tomorrow to fresh woods and Pastures new’. The author seemed to have originally titled the novel as “The Sacred Land”. Subsequently it was changed as a consequence of a political incident at that time. The novelist himself reveals

by the time I finished my novel and as I was going to give it to the press, Indira Gandhi was assassinated. So I thought that there was no justification for calling it The Sacred Land, when a woman is killed mercilessly in her own building. I said to myself that I should not use this title. Still I could not change the novel because it was all over. So I gave another title Pastures New.²

The novelist explains further that,

the novel does not glorify any particular individual. It is aimed at glorification of Hindu faith. This faith is not a
recent one but as old as Hindu itself. Unlike in other novels where a particular life is glorified in this novel the attempt has been to produce the best Hindu faith as glorification of India. Because even today we talk about Hindu faith and there are so many eminent persons, who seem to be blessed by God.3

The protagonist Dr. Madhu travels from place to place like the protagonist in a picaresque novel, the difference being it is not an adventurous journey here. It is a pilgrimage to certain holy places. The novel opens at Kanya Kumari, the confluence of the three seas the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. Dr Madhu visits the place to fulfill his long cherished desire. It has been a dream for him to visit the place, about which he had heard a lot.

I had a great desire to visit the place. The confluence of the three seas – the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea is considered to be a sacred place for the Hindus. From time immemorial, a dip in the meeting spot of the three seas was believed to cleanse a person of all his sins, inherited, acquired or committed in his life itself. I never bothered about the sin but I had an inmate curiosity to see natures granted spot. I was
drawn to the place mostly because of its splendor, its holiness was incidental to me. (P.No.1)

This will be a common feeling of every Hindu religious mind, who visits the place. People in India visit such holy places not only to quench their thirst for the enjoyment of the natural beauty or to relish the historical significance of those places but to express their deep faith in religion, in worship, and thereby attain the Moksha, the bliss of the Heaven. These visits bring to them entertainment, education, and enlightenment. Any pilgrim would acquire and cherish all these there. Especially taking a dip in certain holy rivers or confluences is popularly believed to wash away one’s sins. They perform this act with great reverence and devotion. Further, they believe this gives them a new life and spirit. Dr. Madhu takes a holy dip in the holy waters. Just at that moment he happens to save a woman from getting drowned.

That woman turns out to be Lalitha, an old acquaintance of him. Madhu recognizes her to be the former ladylove of his good old friend Ramu, who is currently working as a professor in a University. He happens to meet her after nearly two decades. Lalitha, expresses her gratitude and leaves him with a promise to meet him again at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in the evening. After she leaves, Dr. Madhu gets nostalgic. He remembers distinctly the agony she caused to his friend Rama Mohan some
twenty years ago keeping him in hope first and then leaving him in utter despair.

Dr. Madhu is reminded of the love story of Ramu and Lalitha. It was love at first sight between them. The moment Ramu saw her in a party, he fell deep in love with her. Lalitha also responded to his love. Ramu was an idealist and almost a dreamer. Lalitha’s angelic beauty attracted him much. But somehow Madhu did not like Lalitha’s coquettish nature at that time. While Ramu could succeed in obtaining his parents’ consent for the intermarriage, Lalitha, on the other hand, backed out. She yielded to her parental presures to marry another person of their choice. The moment Ramu was jilted, the world seemed to him dreary, flat, and unprofitable. The worst thing that followed was that Ramu was driven out of the town by Lalitha’s parents, lest he should be a hindrance to their daughter’s marriage. This irritated Dr. Madhu. But for his timely intervention, his friend Ramu’s life would have been ruined. Since then Dr. Madhu never saw Lalitha again nor heard of her.

After great struggle and torture, Ramu at last settled down in life. He became a professor in a University in Madras. He married an understanding woman who left him free to his professional work. With his busy academic work and in his wife’s amiable and amicable company, Ramu could at last forget Lalitha and gradually settled down in life. He
was quite happy and contented with his wife Suguna and his only daughter, Prem. Dr. Madhu is reminded of all these things the moment he sees Lalitha.

Later, in the evening Lalitha meets him at the Vivekananda Rock. Dr. Madhu sees the place for the first time. He is much impressed by the loftiness and serenity of the rock. The bronze statue of Vivekananda, graceful and dignified in its standing posture, looked very imposing against the background of the sea all around. The place is very grand and awe inspiring. It is to see its beauty that he has come to that place. He feels that to be one of the glorious moments in his life. While he enjoys the natural beauty in all its splendour there, Lalitha narrates to him her own story.

After leaving Ramu, Lalitha was married to Venu by her parents. Soon she realized that there were temperamental differences between them. While she longed for the moon, he was down to earth and practical minded. He was often in a world of business and it was a sordid life for her. The only solace to her was her daughter, Vimala. Years rolled by dryly and morosely. Vimala was married to Dr. Raja Rao and Lalitha was with them presently after having broken all her ties with her husband. Her pitiable story moves Dr. Madhu. It is quite clear that “she has gone through life silently, stoically, almost accepting her lot as her due for having been unfair to Ramu.”(P.No.7)
Lalitha admits her blunder in losing Ramu. She realizes that she has been penalized heavily for her disloyalty in being deprived of the domestic happiness, which remains irreparable and irrecoverable. So she satisfies herself by living in a dream world – an unfinished dream, a delightful interlude perhaps in a dream of pain. She reveals her mind to Dr. Madhu,

I wonder for I have lived in a world of my own all these years and that has been my refuge, my recreational pleasure and my source of happiness. I have relieved the past with fascinating memory and incredible enjoyment. (P.No.11)

Dr. Madhu feels sorry for her. He understands how the little glories she ought to have enjoyed in life have been missed by her in real life. They become only part of her day dreams. He pities her plight. The novelist here brings to light the rosy and unfulfilled dreams of the mediocre life of the average human beings. He draws the realistic picture of the romantic world of many day-dreaming people in the society.

Dr. Madhu finds Lalitha to be very simple, naive, and truthful in her account. His earlier opinion about her is now changed. He thinks well of her and looks forward to meeting her again. On the other hand, by strange
co-incidence, Lalitha happens to meet Ramu and his wife there in Kanyakumari. Dr. Madhu feels happy for that sacred place has brought them together, “Like the confluence of the seas, Kanyakumari seems to be the meeting spot of friends also”(P.No.13)

Though a bit embarrassed, to meet Lalitha after years, that too in the presence of his wife, Ramu soon reconciles with the incident. His wife Suguna receives Lalitha warmly. Madhu and Ramu feel happy to meet each other after a year in that holy place.

All of them move together in Kanyakumari. Hence the novelist presents several issues pertaining to religion, philosophy, and psychology through the interactions among them. This is quite typical of Rama Sarma. In all his writings, he discusses such problems and offers solutions, while taking all precautions not to make them tediously instructive. The novelist uses his characters as his mouthpieces for this purpose. It is this feature in his novels that sustains the interest of the readers. He uses them to echo his assimilation of our customs, traditions, beliefs, superstitions, besides our apprehensions. All these are presented only to conclude with an unswerving faith in the will of God. This appears Miltonic in its conception. But, in fact, it is true of our Hindu religion and philosophy too.
Besides these, Rama Sarma’s novels deal with the contemporaneous situation and problems also. In this novel, through the conversation among the main characters – Dr. Madhu, Ramu, Suguna, and Lalitha – the novelist discusses certain social issues like dowry system, corruption in the Government organizations, lack of commitment among teachers, money-mindedness of the doctors, disloyalty, and insincerity of the politicians, unholliness prevailing in certain pilgrim centres and several others. It is the true picture of the society that he delineates in his novels. All these show that the novelist is trying to draw the picture of the real society around us, he does not leave the issues as issues. He gives relevant explanation, as well for them.

Even from the very first chapter, the main purpose of the novelist is made clear. Pilgrimages to holy places serve the purpose of not only cleansing their sins but also to have new acquaintances, and to share with them their experiences – pleasant and unpleasant. This is the belief and experience prevalent India. In his other novels, Rama Sarma focuses on life’s little glories. But in this novel he glorifies the very Hindu faith itself. He himself makes it clear in a personal interview, “Unlike in other novels where a particular life is glorified, in this novel my attempt has been to produce the best Hindu faith as glorification of India”\textsuperscript{4}
The next scene shifts to Rameswaram. Two more characters, Lalitha’s daughter Vimala and son-in-law Dr. Raja Rao join them. The architectural beauty and the stupendous corridors of the temple with its four thousand pillars baffle them. They feel that their spiritual quest or thirst is fulfilled. They bathe in its Theerthas for purification. They come out of the temple with a radiant glow on their faces.

In the evening they approach the seashore to watch the vast panorama of nature, resplendent and glorious. They observe that apart from the holiness attached to these places, they are also famous for their scenic beauty and grandeur.

Rama Sarma introduces another character, Gopal, at this juncture in order to delineate yet another human experience. It is typical of his method to juxtapose the main theme along with different kinds of human experiences, pleasant and unpleasant.

The next day when they visit the temple again, Dr. Madhu happens to meet Gopal, one of his old friends. The novelist introduces his character in order to show the optimistic nature of some people despite certain tragic incidents in their lives. Gopal loses his only son in a car accident. At first he is shocked. But gradually he reconciles to his fate. He does not even blame god for his misfortune. He takes it with patience and fortitude.
When Dr. Madhu pities his condition and finds fault with God for being so cruel towards him, Gopal says,

"Don't bring in God. We are responsible for our actions. I have been unfair to others and say I pay the penalty. I can't escape. When every thing goes well, we feel proud of ourselves as though we are the doers. When something goes wrong, we want to blame God for our misfortunes". (he further continues) I am now on a pilgrimage to all the sacred spots. These religions centers may give me some solace. At least is a good thing in our country. In moments of depression and desperation, we can visit these places and get sustenance. Despite degeneracy in ethical values, we still have these temples, monumental edifices at sanctity, that remind us of our glorious spiritual past. On my return I shall start an educational institution and name it after my son". (P.Nos.38-39)

This shows how the holy places serve to give solace and peace of mind to people. This is the faith Indians have in visiting holy places. This faith glorifies their lives. Gopal's experience teaches others a good lesson.
They all leave Rameswaram in good spirit, with a plan to have their next visit to Varanasi some time later.

Dr. Madhu gets back to his home at Tirupathi. His wife Sarada, who could not accompany him on the pilgrimage on health grounds, feels happy to hear about the experiences of her husband. Just at that time, their son Mohan, who had been away for three years in London, comes back after getting his Ph.D. It looks like a family reunion for all of them. Dr. Madhu is blessed with a happy domestic life. His wife Sarada has been a suitable companion for him.

The novelist presents that it is a good fortune for one to get an understanding life-partner. The domestic happiness depends upon faith, friendship, loyalty, and love between the couple, it is this which makes the institution of marriage more successful in India when compared to the same in the western countries. There, it is a marriage between bodies where as here, it becomes a marriage of bodies and souls. Life is an economic agreement there and it is a social and spiritual adjustment here. While their glories depend on their economic status, they depend mostly on the filial bonds and human religions here.

In every possible context, the novelist focuses on the Indian way of life and glorifies every aspect of it. He presents yet another unique Indian
custom of how the Indian families turn friendship into relationship well within the scope of the caste. The something happens in case of Dr. Madhu and Ramu. Madhu's son Mohan is wedded to Ramu's daughter Prem. Such arranged marriages prove to be more successful in India. Petty problems may crop up now and then between the young couple. They look up to the elders to give them proper guidance and help them rid themselves of their problems.

With new relations and new hopes, the protagonist sets out to visit more places. In India such journeys become honeymoon trips for the young couples and pilgrimages for the old ones. These are the glories one enjoys at the prime of youth as well as at a ripe age.

Dr. Madhu and all others reach Puttaparthi. The novelist proceeds to give an account of the serene and tranquil atmosphere at Prasanthi Nilayam in Puttaparthi. Unlike the other Pilgrim places, where people of one particular religion gather, Puttaparthi becomes a place of configuration for people belonging to different cultures, religions and nations. Bhagavan Satya Sai stands as an epitome of peoples' faith in saintly souls. The huge gatherings of the Hindus, the Christians, the Mohammedans, and others leave everyone in astonishment. It is sheer faith above anything else.
As the swami himself says, he has no caste, no religion. He is for establishing Sanathana Dharma (ancient religions practice) and for reviving our glorious spiritual heritage. In this dark age of unfaith he is making thousands of human beings wholesome and purified. He is the saviour of the lost humanity. Anyway, let us not question his ways, for they are mysterious. Let us accept them for all his efforts are directed towards elevation of mankind. He emphasizes the need for implicit faith in God and doing our work with dedication. All this will lead to an understanding of God of establishing right relationship with him. That is, when we attain Gnana or wisdom. (P.No.68)

The novelist explains how the Indians regard saintly souls. From the times of Adi Sankaracharya to the Buddha, and of late to Gandhi and Bhagavan Satya Sai Baba, people have been worshipping these saintly souls assuming that they are the chosen ones, the representatives or even the reincarnations of God. As Mukaram puts it, their experience with these saintly souls

is partly human and partly divine. Man sitting at the holy feet of a very great sage, a Guru, who shows the
truth and gives out a message, it is drawing sustenance from a Man-Divine. The experience at Prasanthi Nilayam illustrates this.\(^5\)

Though worshipped like Gods by Millions these divine people never call themselves gods. They call themselves prophets or messengers who have come into this world to spread the message of God. Bhagavan Satya Sai also says.

I have come to bring light of love to this world. That love will reach the heart of the devotees and they, in turn, will let its glow surround them and reach outwards to all they meet. That love is God. It can drive away the darkness.\(^6\)

It is this Godly love which moves the devotees more than the physical lures because, as the Hindu mythologies and scriptures say, divine or Godly love is the ultimate goal of any human being.

Later on Mohan and others get a chance of meeting the Bhagavan personally. Their world of experience becomes richer with the blessings of the Bhagavan. They leave Puttaparthi with peace, contentment, and happiness.
Their next visit is to Varanasi, considered to be one of the ancient cities in the world. A dip in the Ganges is supposed to wash away all sins. The temple is a smaller one as compared to the magnificent temples of the south. The sanctorum of the people draws crowds there. It moves Dr. Madhu to exclaim;

In this mad, mad word of demonic potential, we thought that India still retained its spiritual glow and strove for uplifting the world through ethical values. Despite all the unseemly, unbecoming acts of violence and perversions of human behaviour, India still stood as the beacon light of spiritual knowledge. We were definitely aware of the recent inroads into our culture and the attempts of some to look some foreign. But however, whenever we visited these pilgrim centers and saw the pilgrims awed by religious feeling, we felt that there was still hope for survival and all the best in us was not lost. (P.No.84)

In Varanasi, the novelist introduces another couple, Kumar and Kamala. Through Kumar's episode, the novelist presents yet another spectrum of life in India. Because of his mother's greediness for more
dowry, Kumar is separated from his beloved wife, Kamala. He runs away from home and reaches Varanasi to lead a peaceful life there. But his faith in Lord Viswanath restores in him domestic bliss. He gets a job there and later meets his separated wife and settles well in life. He attributes it to the blessings of the Lord and so he makes it a point to visit the temple every day as a sign of his sense of gratitude towards the Lord. The couple, deprived of the domestic happiness, regain it with the blessings of the God. The faith in divine providence is glorified here.

Their last pilgrimage is to Tirupathi, where Dr. Madhu has settled down. Though the visit to the Tirumala temple is not for the first time, Dr. Madhu along with others, feels a mystic experience every time he visits the temple of Lord Venkateswara of the Seven Hills. He attributes his every achievement in life – his employment, his marriage, the fortune of being blessed with a good wife and a son, construction of a house at the feet of the Seven Hills – to the divine dispensation of the Lord of the Seven Hills. It is this kind of an innate faith which draws thousands of people every day to this place; Ramu also says that,

For the common man the darshan of Lord is a satisfying experience. He has received the Lords’ grace or is expecting it. So a visit to the temple is a part of his sincere belief that the Lord will be with him in all his
trials and tribulations. You may call it faith or superstition, it does not matter. (P.Nos.127-128)

This is the common feeling of every devotee who visits the temple. People come to the temples with burdened souls. Once they have the darshan of the Lord, they feel that their burden is removed to its core. While the common people cherish this sentimental feeling, as Dr. Madhu emphasizes,

To the intellectual, the Jnani, the darshan of the Lord is a felt experience, a soul stirring exaltation and finally it leads to God realization.(P.No.128)

All the other people agree with the views expressed by both of them. The journey Tirupathi provides them a rich experience of spiritual enlightenment. Surprisingly, Lalitha and Ramu, who have been suffering from certain inhibitions till then, get relief to their encumbered souls. When Lalitha reveals about her past love story with Ramu, the latter’s wife Suguna takes it sportively and in fact sympathizes with her. It also helps them to get rid of the guilty consciousness. Their hearts heave a sigh of relief. They become plain souls. Also Lalitha gets a warm and affectionate invitation from Prem and Mohan to stay with them in Delhi to spend the
rest of her life in their company, in happiness. Lalitha feels elated and promises to join them at the appropriate time.

Thus the novelist provides necessary strength to go through the life's ordeal for some and spiritual sustenance to others. Their joys, sorrows, experiences – pleasant and unpleasant, all these are shared by them in those holy places. The novel concludes on a note of exaltation in the words of Dr. Madhu, the omniscient narrator:

If the poets dream of a millennium, a golden age, we dream of a world order and world citizenship when love of fellow human beings and establishment of peace become universally accepted. (P.No.164)

After the pilgrimage, one is bound to acquire ethical idealism, moral sensitiveness and robust attitude towards life. Besides, they teach one to develop an optimistic outlook, philanthropic, social, nature tendency, and above all, spiritual enlightenment. People come with heavy hearts to these places, unburden themselves with the help of divine dispensation, and return homes with lightened hearts and enlightened minds with no more worries or regrets for them. This is the experience of not one single individual but of the people in general who return from their pilgrimage. It is a common faith in them which makes them feel so. Rama Sarma makes
it clear in his interview that in this novel he does not glorify any particular character. He says,

Unlike in other novels, where a particular life is glorified, in this novel my attempt has been to produce the best Hindu faith as glorification of India ------

Because the significance is not for characterization in this novel, the idea is to give to the modern reader something of our ancient Hindu faith and the culture we see even today surviving from that prehistoric age.7

In this modern age, when the influences from the western culture are pouring in, especially, on the younger generation, there is a need to educate people about the glorious past of Indian culture. Rama Sarma tries to rejuvenate that faith in the people. He attempts to create a realistic, rationalistic, and nationalistic zeal in the people through his writings. This may appear sentimental or even idiosyncratic for some people. But the attempt is certainly not going to be futile. It shall certainly appeal to the people one day or the other. He feels it to be his moral, social, religious, and patriotic responsibility

to remind the reader that he is living in such a country, that has produced this kind of faith. So, this is
nationalistic you may say, in one angle, because it is the glorification of the faith of this nation. Also it is a sort of exhortation to the present day world that all is not lost. Still we have the glorification of our culture. It is a revelation to the present generation that we still own God and we still have God and that is our real strength, our moral strength.8

The novel is thus aimed at bringing out the best in the Indian culture and Indian religious background. The novelist does not glorify either the domestic or personal life's little glories. The whole faith of a community is glorified here. In a conventional novel, there is a hero or a protagonist whose personal life is a sort of revelation or glorification that has come to him. But that does not happen in the novel. This is a novel which delves deep into the Hindu faith in a large measure and emphasizes the fact that it still survives despite all the attacks it faced. The glorification of this faith has been successfully accomplished by the novelist by collectively bringing together the picture of certain holy places like Varanasi, Rameswaram, Tirupathi, and so on.

As has been observed by Mukharam,
this novel looks forward to a day when India will lead the other nations of the world in its quest for spiritual enlightenment. The narrator Dr. Madhu feels that even the West is satisfied with its pursuit of material gains it will look to the East, especially to India for a better way of life and for God realization.9

Professor Williams D. Hunter after reading Pastures New writes to Professor Rama Sarma about the supreme joy he felt on seeing the Lord Venkateswara in Tirupathi during his stay as visiting professor in Sri Venkateswara University in 1983. He says, “Another part that meant a great deal to me was the worship of Divya Manohara Murthy with the complex and profound meanings involved”. He finds it “the most moving religious experience of my life -- a peace as our Bible says, that passes all understanding”.10

Professor Collmer felt that the novel is elevating and enlightening. As he observes, “the attempt to introduce both an eclectic philosophy and an emphasis on Indian insights struck me as particularly fascinating”.11

Professor K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly comments that,
"The Pastures New are really the age long sacred spots
that, as Gandhi said in his *Hindu Swaraj* 80 years ago,
hold India together and preserve its inner purity".\textsuperscript{12}

The novelist as a visionary, all through dreams of a new world order
and contres the story round a few holy places mainly to create an
authenticity for the socio-religious life in India and to show the abiding
influence of these places of worship on the rich and the poor alike.

The novel though appears to be a search for the self or a spiritual
quest the novelist’s aspiration to see a new society, a new social order as a
way out for all the ills of life and society is clearly visible throughout the
novel. Every event and every visit contributes to the richness of the main
theme – to move towards establishing a better world order in future.
REFERENCES

1. Rama Sarma, M.V. : *Pastures New*, Emerald Publications, 1985 (Back cover page). All further references to the text are indicated by page numbers.

2. “Interview with Rama Sarma” by Research Scholar.

3. Ibid

4. “Interview with Rama Sarma”


7. “Interview with Rama Sarma”

8. Ibid

