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## **Freedom of Thought, Expression and Indian Subcontinental Fiction Writers**

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### **Abstract:**

In pre-independence, Indian's have struggled a lot for the freedom of nation but after having independence for seventy years, we have to constantly struggle to protect and maintain the right of thought and expression. Fiction writers and artists have to face resentment against their works such as books, paintings and sculptures etc. Through their various artistic talents, they attempt to improve and transform the social structure, makes additions and omissions, in nation's tradition and culture. Without freedom they cannot produce new ideologies, perspectives and vision of transitional life. Human civilization developed and progressed with creation of art, from early Mesolithic age to the postmodern era that was only possible with creation of writers and artists. They face extortions from religious extremists in the Indian subcontinents. In this paper, I explore how freedom of thought and expression are essential to the enrichment of society. It is also necessary to have judiciary or self-control to intact religious and national integrity.

### **Keywords**

Fiction Writers, Freedom, Thought, Expression, Mesolithic Age, Civilization, Integrity.

### **Introduction:**

Though the pen is mightier than the sword, many contemporary fiction writers have received death threats or have been attacked by fanatic, we have to check in the contemporary scenario how it's applicable? Whatever is, isright? Or is their need to change? Still, we have to pay for the sake of liberty? Raises the voice for the right to freedom of thought and expression? Really very serious question to ask but very complicated to answer. When,people read bansor assaults on film and fiction writers. We become serious and think revolutionary change is possible through the arts and literature.We need freedom of thought and expressionfor creationand let the people decide the significance of work.It is the writer, who opensa specific subject for discussion and after that; the truth emerges for welfare of society.

It is certain that a vision of life has to writers and with the imagination; they craft their fiction and puts their thought to the reader. They derive some facts from reality, history and observations in the society. For fiction writing, they use historical characters as a blueprint for their plots which they then reimagine accepted facts in new and fascinating ways. Their stories

often parallel historical accounts or figures while providing reading with moral lessons which is one of the primary functions of literature. This enables individuals to challenge the views or opinions of the larger society. Through authors thought or philosophy of life, they reconstruct new social order, omits those are harmful and crafts new one which is essential for to improve society. Many people, religious groups, castes, and races may blind them or encourage them to craft new visions of live based on their beliefs, religion and political views. This establishes the development of a complicated social order which may threaten the moral fiber of the nation as a whole. For the progress of the nation and peaceful co-living, it is necessary to accept the new vision for life formed by writers. If we deny freedom of expression and thought, it cannot be probable for the writer to create the new vision of life. Without vision, life becomes monotonous, emotionless and meaningless to live the life. The human civilization without principle, moral and humanism, only the violence will take place and become the prime cause of destroying human race.

French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau promulgated ethics of equality, fraternity, and freedom, gave a big bolt to the regime of Louis XVI, further the wind of democracy started France and spread around the world. Charles Darwin in his *Origin of the Species* enlightens that human being has not created within six days by God but it evolved from small insects. He challenged the Bible and faced many difficulties but now it has become clear that he is right. It changes the structure of society with perception in life. One of the best example is Sigmund Freud in his *Day Dreaming* explains the nature and behavioral aspect of human beings. Does Freud challenge the reality, which is more important, external or internal? India is not the exception for that, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* by Vyas and Valmiki changed society and its values. Rabindranath Tagore through his literature inculcated the message of equality of all religion. He faces censorship from British government but continued his writing and painting until his death. He encouraged patriotism among the people of India his written and visual texts.

After the independence, the nation enjoyed the fruits of democracy however; a recent wave of violence and intolerance is consuming the nation has saddening its writers immensely. It has become difficult for writers to narrate fiction without fear and pressures. Charanjeet Kaur says that, "With every ban that is enforced by the state the question of freedom of expression is revived and granted a new lease of life. Every decade since independence, with every successive government at the Centre and in the States, has seen its share of controversial painters, writers and filmmakers who have been perceived as posing a threat to the social and moral fiber of India".<sup>1</sup> They have to step up the court for justice of creative freedom, face abuses, agitation, and assaults from the people. They have to run away from their nation and live in other countries. Even they leave writing because of the agitator and declared the death of writer among them. Many agitators announce Fatwa to kill the writer and lacks of prizes declared for assassination. Today, world affecting art of creative writing is in crisis, without freedom of expression and thought the progress of human being is incomplete

## **Review of Literature**

The fiction writing flourished with the introduction of Caxton's printing press in England. With the rise of the middle class, it became a prestigious point of behavior that so many middle-class women kept a copy of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) as a symbol of chastity. Fiction became a major medium for artistic expression during this period; it also reflected the style of the society. Though fiction was at the top of the time and got immense love from the reader, further fiction writer faced difficult problems from the society by social, religious and political sentiment. From the 13th century with *The Decameron* of Boccaccio's and in the 14th century with Geoffrey Chaucer's short story collection of *The Canterbury Tales* (1478) which contained obscene, filthy material. In 1664 John Milton's *Areopagitica* collection of essays was banned on the basis of political reason in England, along Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) which also became the victim for obscenity. During the enlightenment period, there was a great conflict between religion and science, religion was the central force of the society. Pope was dominant in social structure; the first belief that the world is created by God was disturbed with new theories. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was banned in Ireland in 1932 because of references of sexual promiscuity. In 1856 realistic writer Gustave Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov, *Moll Flanders* (1722) by Daniel Defoe and *Lady Chatterley's Lovers* (1928) by D.H. Lawrence were banned for their strong sexual content which was offensive according to the public moral code of the time. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) were banned because of political trenchant criticism of the Russian regime which advocated freedom of expression. Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) was banned for commenting on government's policy of racialism. The current example, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) in Lebanon was banned by Catholic leader for offensive material against Christianity.

In India, Katherine Mayo's *The Face of Mother India* (1927) was interdicted a religious attack on the pope and its corruption. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) written by V.S. Naipaul has forbidden in India for its negative portrayal of India. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991) has removed from the syllabus of Mumbai University after agitation by Shiv Sena in Mumbai. Arundhati Roy also faced charges of obscenity after the publication of *The God of Small Things* (1997) in her home state of Kerala. After the threat given by fundamentalist, in January 2012 Salman Rushdie avoided attending the famous Jaipur Literary Festival. A Dalit writer, DuraiGuna, was forced to leave his home, while author Ma Mu Kannan watched the burning of his library and studio after his second novel. Another Tamil progressive writer, PuliurMurugesan, was beaten not long ago subsequent to the distribution of his story gathering. Nowadays, in the Indian subcontinent, many writers are criticized for their work, which is viewed as challenging the religious and political order of the society. It is the basic strategy that authors from both inside and outside India use to boost their voices, read and buy their books, and display those threatening and killing strategies can't mute writers. India is a country of various religions and caste groups, its strength lies in diversity but being patriotic they are very sensitive about their religion and caste. It is necessary to look beyond the religion and caste;

there are rationality and humanism, which is the master-key to the progress of human civilization.

Recently, there are many serious controversies over the treatment of religion and sexuality. Against this background, the present article would try to light up why we respect the right of free thought and expression and how this flexibility will be weighed against different beliefs, such as multicultural ethnicity and the constitutional rights of society. I argue that both authors and society believe in religious freedom and the function of thought. I have selected the Indian sub-continental fiction writers; those are controversial about their writing for discussions are Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (Hindi), Tamil writer, Perumal Murugan's *Mathorubhagan* (2010) or *The One Part Women* (2013) and Marathi writer Annand Yadav's *SantasuryaTukaram*(2009) as selected fiction writers.

### **Salman Rushdie and Fatwa**

Salman Rushdie is a worldwide famous fiction writer, who writes and speaks blatantly about politics and religion of the Indian subcontinent. He was born in India, but was reared in Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. He currently live in London. G. Mojtabai stated that, "It is Mr. Rushdie's wide-ranging power of assimilation and imaginative boldness that make his work so different"<sup>2</sup> than other writers. He has won Booker of the Booker Prize for his novel *Midnight's Children*, which explores his personal experiences and uses India and Pakistan as the backdrop for his narrative. *Shame* (1983) focuses on vulgar politics and political leader of Pakistan, besides *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Satanic Verses* (1998) was deemed controversial due to its obscene depiction of the prophet Muhamad. Rushdie used devices like political allegory, satire, fragmentation, and juxtapositions as his literary weapons in his fictionalized narratives. He is a fiction writer, who changes the experimentation of postmodern writing with his liberal thinking and straight forward slant toward international issues of politics and religion. Rushdie himself writes "one day they (Muslims) may agree that- as the European Enlightenment demonstrated- freedom of thought is precisely freedom from religious control, freedom from accusations of blasphemy"<sup>3</sup>. He is a Voltaire of the postmodern era, narrates with self-influence, making the mixture of myth and history.

*The Satanic Verses* was banned from 1988 to 1998 in the Indian subcontinent for immoral depictions of prophet Muhammad. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini announced fatwa for assassination of Rushdie and instructed to make sure that death sentence must carry out, adding that whoever will kill rewarded as a martyr. It has called as "The Rushdie Affair" under threat of life Rushdie left for London. It has claimed that *The Satanic Verses* is a collection of insult, blasphemy, and obscenity against Islam. Here arise the questions of freedom of thought and expression against the religious belief of the people. The right to freedom of thought and expression should not be practiced at the expenses of others. It is better that both parties come forward with two steps that Muslim should try to cut harmful old practices and Rushdie should try to avoid the direct hit on the religious belief. He can make soft target to remove harmful old rituals. M. K. Gandhi also advised to Dalit not follow the bad manners besides he does not

forget the upper-class make aware that they should respect Dalit and named as Harijan (son of God). There is a need of second Raja Ram Mohan Roy being Hindu he established BrahmaSamaj. Akbar in the 14th century attempted Din-i-Ilahi named new version of the religious manuscript but could not successfully promote it. They should give importance to rationality instead religious belief that will certainly lead to improve the perspective of people for nurturing world peace.

### **Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja***

Taslima Nasrin is the prominent voice of Bangladesh, who came into the limelight after her controversial fiction *Lajja* was banned in 1993 throughout the Indian subcontinent. She became a global figure as a champion of free thought and speech, for political and religious bigotry. She writes blatantly about her personal sexual escapades with renowned writer and politician in her fiction. *Nirbachita Column* and *AamarMeyebela* (My Girlhood), for that Taslima Nasrin, has been privileged with Ananda Award in 1992 and 2000 respectively. Nasrin's outspoken treatment of sexualized topics, her frequent sarcastic remarks on Islam, an offensive depiction of the prophet Muhammad had been criticized and unwelcome in the Indian subcontinent. She was forced to leave the country or to face the death penalty by the court under the section 295-an article and the Fatwa of the Sahaba Sainik Parishad (commonly described as the soldier of Islam) in 1993.

In *Lajja*, she described the marginalized treatment for minority Hindu practitioners in Bangladesh after the crushing of Babri Mosque in India which created religious tensions in the Indian subcontinent. The novel portrays the dilemma of Dhaka, which she has based on a Hindu Family and the hijacking of a little girl named Maya, at the height of religious pressure. The earlier night they leave for India, Maya's brother Suranjan brings home a Muslim whore, clearly to take revenge on Bangladeshi Muslims. *Lajja* reports the assaults on minorities sloping over Bangladesh and tells Hindu dangers to abolish Bangladesh's national Mosque, the BaitulMukarram. Nasrin says, "She did not criticize Islam in her controversial novel "Lajja" and the fatwa against her is because of her criticism of the religion in many of her other books".<sup>4</sup>

Nasrin's communal description after the destruction of Babri Mosque certainly blurs the secular image of Bangladesh. It treats Muslims as rigid fundamentalists like Iran and other Muslim fanatic countries. However, the colonial legacy of the Bangladesh is well-shaped on the world map. Here, I will not advocate Nasrin for criticizing marginalized Hindu's in the Islamic country. For depicting oppressed voice of the Hindu family or military operation carried out in wartime. She also described hard sexual images of a woman's mind and body. All things considered as the right of freedom of thought and expression given by democratic nation. But Nasrin had to control (in limited) herself from making controversial statements in her interview of local English daily Statesman in Calcutta. Even She underestimated the activist and supporter of her writing. She has been interviewed by the BBC, smoking cigar in one hand and holding the Koran in the other hand which presents a disturbing image for religious belief holders. Though Nasrin has given clarification as reported in the journal of Woman and Revolution, she stated that "I hold the Koran, the Vedas, and the Bible and all such religious texts determining the lives

of their followers as out-of-place and out of time. We have crossed the social-historical contexts where these have written and therefore, we should not guide by their precepts; the question of revising thoroughly or otherwise is irrelevant. We have to move beyond these ancient texts if we want to progress".<sup>5</sup>This fueled the fire for the agitators, 30000 demonstrators marched on the road of Dhaka demanding death punishment and trial in the court for blasphemy.

Here, world should not blame completely to Nasrin, the death threat was given many times to Bengali poet and activist Begum Sufia Kamal, and she also received Fatwa's several times but she ignored focusing on the daily routine. There is the flip side of the coin that Bangladesh Nationalist Party government in 1994 was facing demands from Awami League and Jatiyo Dal alliance. They forced a number of demands including the resignation of the BNP government and take election under a caretaker government. So BNP wants to divert the attention of the people from national politics, they created division between the oppositional political parties with the Nasrin affair. That's why the controversy about Nasrin and her exile should not be treated simply Islāmic fundamentalist issue but as a political, issue of freedom of thought and expression.

### **Gounder's Case of Perumal Murugan**

Perumal Murugan is an Indian author, who writes in Tamil, his novel *One Part Woman* originally translated from Tamil novel *Mathorubhagan* by Mr. Vasudevan, based on Lord Shiva's avatar in half male and half female. The novel opens the subject of religious belief in the rural area of Tamil Nadu, which faced a lot of controversy over the novel from religious groups like RashtriyaSwaysevakSangh and BharatiyaJanata Party and Hindu militants but Madras High Court order in favor of the writer about rights of thought and expression.

It is a story of young peasant couple Kali and Ponna lived in the western part of Tamil Nadu, after twelve years of happy marriage, still waiting for a child as heir therefore criticized by society. Kali and Ponna offer ritual sacrifice to the Pavatha (ferocious female deity) and climb the Varadikkal, barren women's rock, on the hill of Thiruchengodu, but these efforts do not bear fruit. They make many appeals to regional god and progress sexual relations but unfortunately, the wife cannot conceive a child. Therefore, family members of both the wife and husband suggested making final attempt by attending a chariot festival, where, married women have the right to have a sexual intercourse with a stranger and fulfill her wish to become pregnant. After the sexual act with a stranger, circumstances changes between wife and husband. The novel highlights the tension between the couple act as a question of morality or social acceptance of the stranger's child as an heir. Here Murugan portrays the story with a twentieth-century background; still, women have to follow the rules of traditions. Moreover, she has not right of choice to make sexual relationship with the person she likes, that's the predicament of the woman. Moreover, the novel is strongly sensitive in its approach to community and sexuality. Murugan explores the tyranny of caste and pathologies of a community in tearing the couple apart and destroying their marriage.

In Tamil Nadu, there was a custom in which at celebrations a childless woman can meet with a stranger she desires and can have a child. In the Ardhanariswara sanctuary in

Tiruchengode, this custom shaped a piece of the annual chariot celebration. Ponna's relatives convince her to attend this arrangement. She accepts that the arrangement and vanishes into the darkness amid the celebration looking for a partner who could bless her with a child. It is this conclusion which has given material to Hindu fundamentalists to target Perumal Murugan and the publisher. The activists seem to have deliberately ignored the way that the story has set before, seventy-five years ago. The story of a childless couple has been portrayed with great suffering and sensitivity. However, Murugan used names of locations and gatherings, hence making him a victim of criticism from agitators. There was the belief that those who are waiting for a child, God came to help in the disguise of the stranger and fulfills the wish of the desired couple. "Classical Hindu traditions refer to this practice as *niyoga* or *niyoga dharma* — a sign of its religious sanction. It is this section of the novel that has provoked the fury of Hindu fundamentalists and caste purists."<sup>6</sup> If society accepts this belief, what is the problem with the fiction? Was a remarkable question should be asked. Murugan forced to withdraw his literature from the public arena. He later declared that the author in him was dead and he would not write again. Furthermore, he will prefer to be an only professor and will not attend any literary festival. He will give compensation to the publisher and reader those bought books for reading.

The gounder's has objected to fiction, Murugan belong the same community, how he will devalue his community but he exposed the grim reality behind the social ill practices. He has been outspoken about the evil practice of caste discrimination. "Versatile, sensitive to history and conscious of his responsibilities as a writer,"<sup>7</sup> says author and translator N. Kalyan Raman in a glowing appraisal of Murugan work. It is a curious paradox that even as progressive Indians would like to abolish the caste system, they have little or no understanding of the existed reality of specific caste groups in their traditional homelands. Even these communities were followed and often expelled by the forces of modernization; they stay a prisoner to the ways of the past that have sustained them for centuries. Will they ever be able to enter a secular future? Perumal Murugan has at least shown us a glimpse of what our collective struggle would about. In the backdrop of animated debates worldwide over the freedom of expression, this instance of a writer's voice being crushed comes as a painful reminder of where India stands.

### **Ananda Yadav and *Santasurya Tukaram***

Ananda Yadav was a prominent Marathi writer, who developed the form of Marathi Gramin literature in Maharashtra. His autobiography's become the prime source of inspiration in the state. He also contributed to the rise and development of Dalit literature. He changed the stream of upper-class literature to the literature of village younger's and their tradition, which affected the lives of these people. *Natarang* (2010) was the novel based on the life of Nachya ( a male dancer who dance wearing women's clothing in Tamasha ) and emotional conflict about being a man he has to treat like women, how he face the boycott from society for the sake of art like Tamaasha. It has converted into Marathi film named *Natarang* performed by Atul Kulkarni in lead role. Yadav's contribution to Marathi literature was outstanding, at the last stage of his life, he wrote *Santasurya Tukaram*, the novel on the life of Saint Tukaram in Maharashtra. It was controversial novel, leads the agitation of Varkari Sampradaya being charged with obscenity



about Saint Tukaram's life. It was the issue of writer's thought and expression and sentiment of Varkari devotees of God Vittal of Pandharpur.

The major objection was that he has narrated Saint's childhood life as ordinary, he described saint's life was very common like others childhood, saint played the games and fulfilled the emotional needs like sexuality. Yadav explains that before the saint, the human being was certainly the common man with human emotions but after the triumph over natural emotion he achieves the moral stage of the Saint. He married, his first wife and had two children died in the famine. He then married second time. His father was money-lender and shopkeeper but Tukaram leaves his business. Varkari rejected this view and compelled Yadav to withdraw his remarks against saint Tukaram. Jaisingh More said, "The references made in the novel are baseless and defamatory to the great saints of Maharashtra. The court has fined the author and the publisher."<sup>8</sup> The court suggested that what you express about saint was a part of your opinion but if it harms the sentiments of the people you should change it or withdraw it.

In this conflict, it is certain that understanding the life of Saint has like the story of one elephant and six blind people, everyone according to their perception created the image of saint Tukaram. A.H. Salunkhe was successful to build the image of the Saint as Vidrohi (Revolutionary) Tukaram, Dilip Chitre in his collection of poems *Say's Tuk* provides a successful image of the saint as ethical. In the same way, Yadav realized that before saint he was an ordinary man, after triumphing on human emotion Tukaram reached the stage of the saint. It was a matter of perception.

In this regard, I put forward the predicament of Saint Dnyaneshwar, who faced the boycott from Brahmin, his own community. They have rejected the right of the community, they suggested if you want to become the part of the community his father should make Aatmyag (leave soul with fasting for God) so his mother also left the soul and Dnyaneshwar and his brothers become orphan. Further, Dnyaneshwar has written *Dnyaneshwari* then he achieves the stage of the saint that was the life of ordinary people. It has accepted by the society but Yadav's expression has objected and challenged by Varkari Sangh. As a writer, Yadav has right of expression on the other Varkari Sangh also right for their sentiment about saint Tukaram. It was better if he fictionalizes the saint with other name and prepares the mindset of the reader / Varkari through lecture, maybe there was the different situation. At the same time, Varkari should understand fiction was the work of creation, they should read and understand novel and not blindly follow others opinion, those used as a political weapon against the literary politics of upper-class and the literature of Gramin (village) people.

## **Conclusion**

Human beings are intelligent animals in the world; they have developed from the evolution of nature. Man (and this includes woman) have acquire the supreme power of intellect, language, and thinking. With the evolution of the world, there was a battle of modernity and traditional ideas. Because of this visa-versa thinking, there were a lot of quarrels among the society. Many times thinking or rationality converted into battle on the ground or to kill the producer of the

thought. There were a large number of schools of thoughts or dogma's based on caste and religion. Fascists versus democratic, religious versus secular, rightist versus leftists and Hindu versus Muslim religious ideologies were produced. From these schools of thoughts, there was a dispute which leads to the rise of new streams of ideologies. These streams of new ideologies blessed for the protection of the human being.

Socrates, Copernicus, Galileo, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi in India faced great trouble when they put the truth before the society. They were insulted, assaulted and sentenced to the death; it reflects the negative attitude of the people to look towards the philosophers/writers. Thought became dominant before the traditional society; they try to kill the producer of thought rather than defending with thought. It was the fundamental right of the writer to the freedom of thought and expression. It has affected the lives of the writer; they were killed, exiled and banned from their country. Fight of thought should fight with only thought, for that we should resolve to fight not by killing or banning but with the weapon of rationality that will certainly lead for the safeguard of human civilization.

SukanyaSaha in her article rightly stated that, "Societies which protect freedom of expression in literature have not only earned admiration in the hands of their fiction writers but also are successful in leaving a permanent mark in human consciousness. A society which snatches or controls the freedom of thought and speech is not only exposed with negative connotations but also loses itself as forgotten past since it was never documented in the literature. Hence, it was a two-way process in which the society and its literary produce support each other for nourishment".<sup>9</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan also commented, "It should also be noted that the free speech culture of the west now is better than Indian subcontinent, and a robust public commitment to freedom of expression to protect free speech rights worldwide is important to make sure intellectual growth and independence".<sup>10</sup> I oppose fiction writer's treatment of sex and religion in an thrilling way but also object to the way of handling the matters by various governments in various nations.

Both writer and detractors went for the sensational and sentimental. However, in nations that have marked by multi-ethnicity and different faith groups, writers' freedom of expression should be paired with a keen sense of responsibility. There should limits of freedom of expression, while it is important that nation does not suffocate voices of criticism on a belief system, need to that writers should consider the offense they may cause in the service of free speech. Such self-censorship may prevent many deaths, and support law and order. Though free speech and expression are diamonds of democracy, capacities of criticism also valued in the republic but it integrates the religious identity and moral practice is equally important for national integrity.

Fiction writers have right to criticize religious beliefs? This inquiry might be replied from a few points of view. An ethical argument might be made that such conduct is insensitive, rude and uncivilized. On the other hand, it will be valuable. The exposure of extremists, who use religion to exploit others, or pursue destructive goals, is to the public concern. Criticism of their

religious beliefs and practices are an essential part of this process. Yet, the difference between responsible rejection and irresponsible mockery will be an acceptable one. In my view, the people of different religious backgrounds should have given opportunities to debate with reason and rational way. It will offer a path to awareness, accept and respect each other, education and exposure to new notions. Such debate will pave the way towards greater respect for the freedoms of expression and religion, and a greater eagerness to carry out them in a responsible way. Thus, the peaceful exercise of these rights should never be a meet with punishment though it affects the local norms of religious or ideological beliefs. Pranab Mukherjee in his farewell of presidential address rightly stated that “We may debate, we may agree or we may not agree. But we cannot deny the essential prevalence of multiplicity of opinion. Otherwise, a fundamental character of our thought process will wither away”.<sup>11</sup> It is rightly described through Rabindranath Tagore’s poem “*Where the mind is without fear.*”

Where the mind is led forward by thee  
Into ever-widening thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

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