

Subjectivity and TruthBrij Mohan^{1*}

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**ABSTRACT**

Principled protests and conscientious dissents are magnificent pillars of democracy. The rise of authoritarianism and religious nationalism poses serious threats to civil society—a sociocultural abstraction that warrants secular norms and practices. Policies and laws that muffle this progressive process must be challenged by intellectuals and citizens who value freedom of expression. This author has used Letter to the Editor as a veritable tool to VOICE against oppression. Only a live fish swims against the current.

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Marlon Brando refused to accept his Best Actor award at the 1973 ceremony². His protest is an iconic piece of history. Jean Paul Sartre declined the Nobel prize—which many a writer would kill for—in October 1964. He said he did not want to be “institutionalized.”³

I earned a Ph.D. degree in 1964 at Lucknow University. It was perhaps one of the first doctorates in Social Work. Ever since I gained command over my *consciousness*, Philosophy in action had begun to inspire me. *Social Work* appeared to be a gateway to enter the road for liberation. It’s almost three-quarters of a century that I have been in search of fragments of existential truth. This journey has been lonely, often painful. A profession that I

have served all my life has nearly sidelined me as a ‘Social Work Philosopher.’ Implied euphemism: I am no longer a Social Worker. Thanks to my students: I am touched for being known as ‘Sartre of Social Work.’ I would rather be known as myself, no ingratitude to Jean Paul Sartre—my ego ideal. Vonnie Hawkins, Director of *Social Work Institute*, branded me as Philosopher of Action, while awarding me The Lifetime Achievement Award (NASW, LA.).

The Others who neither understand my philosophy, let alone Sartre’s, continue to misrepresent the reality they don’t understand. I had to take early retirement because the State’s Licensing Board would not *License* me to teach Social Work even after 34 yrs. of my service at the Louisiana State University. I continue to believe that *Social Practice*—not Social Work—is a proper perspective to dialogically confront the hegemonic power which breeds racism and bigotry. The AI Revolution has changed the world we live in. When computers can teach themselves to develop better skills than humans, who cares about

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²Marlon Brando’s Protest against Hollywood - Google Search

³<https://www.google.com/search?q=When+and+WHY+Sartre+refused+the+Nobel+prize>

a helping profession that is both dated and inane? The “social” has been eclipsed by nihilism and narcissism of “work”⁴.

Discourse is one of the core principles unifying the art of dialogical social intercourse. It’s life: A passage marked by ‘responsibility’ and ‘authenticity.’ Dissent is a valid tool to protest. I have used *Letter to the Editor* as a credible source of everyman’s consequential *Voice* that must be heard. **Principled protests and conscientious dissents are safeguards of democracy.** I found this method painfully constructive to *Voice* against certain nefarious practices in the academic world⁵.

As a retired, reclusive professor, I enjoy reading and writing that serve as tranquilizers to overcome workplace toxicity that looms over my subconsciousness. I forgive my Frankenstein, but I can’t forget the wickedness I suffered.

The world beyond academia is no less unkind. Lately, I read about my native country in *The New York Times*. I was happy and sad. I drafted Letter to the *New York Times* which could not be accepted. Likewise, the three Letters that I wrote last month to *NYT*, *The Harper’s*, and *The Nation* died unborn. I have a feeling that certain structural filters masquerade as ‘editorial review’ to exclude an inconvenient truth. The *Letter* that I wrote to *The New York Times*, is cited below:

Dear Editor:

Mujib Mashal and Hari Kumar have a riveting analysis of chasms that threaten India’s solidarity as a free nation presiding over the G20 summit (NYT September 8, 2023: A4). India’s ‘tryst with destiny’ was inherently marred by her balkanized fate masquerading as Independence. I have assayed before about the unfreedoms that we inherited from the rapacious colonial rule. The saddest aspect of this paradoxical tale is India’s mimicking of her archenemy, Pakistan. Religious nationalism has been weaponized by the political party in power. The dynastic hegemony of Congress brought its own ruin from which RSS--and BJP--have monstrously benefited. The fact is: as a *State* India is stronger; as a *Society*, however, it’s getting weaker every time a communal frenzy bedevils Nuh. The rising skyline of Gurugram is a false indicator of New Delhi’s dubious show of power. If a Hindu Pakistan is what Mr. Narendra Modi and his government want, a

darker, regressive, authoritarian future is not that far. Hey, *Bharat*, wake up!

Respectfully,

Brij Mohan

Objectivity in science is the hallmark of solid research. There is no dearth of spurious and shoddy investigations. In humanities and social sciences subjectivity can neither be ignored nor ‘structured.’ Sartrean existentialism was mainly muffled by European post-modernists (and structuralists) who intellectually owed so much to Sartre. Uncompromising, he doubled down on responsibility and public engagement. Subconsciously, I emulate him with profound gratitude and respect. A student always stands on his *gurus’* shoulders, inclusive of Platonic ones.

The *Letter* in reference raises many concerns about the implications of extremism in politics. The seductive indicators of commercial success may not be true reflectors of social progress. Theocratic dominance does not secure civility essential to peaceful coexistence. By the time this essay appears, India may have been branded *Bharat*. This ‘silver bullet’ may retain the ruling party in the saddle at the expense of India’s diverse culture and marginalized people. Historical revisionism is not new. India was ‘balkanized’ by a rapacious colonial British rule⁶. The echoes of “Partition” still reverberate in Punjab on both sides of the border. A *Hindu Pakistan*? Oh, no! Religion is the Holy Grail of theocracy and the Third Rail of political discourse.

India’s current strides strengthen the *State* in the world, especially in the Global South. As a *Society*, however, her regression and repression are tragic. Civically secular existence is a constructive pathway to deconstruct a world riven by communal violence and terror.

When Sartre was protesting the Vietnam War, speaking, writing, and distributing pamphlets in the streets of Paris, many opponents appealed to the government for his arrest. General de Gaulle responded: “You can’t arrest a Voltaire.”

There are no Voltaires. Falsification of truth is the price for raving populism. I have taught Social Policy, Human Diversity, Oppression and Human Behavior during my academic career which spans over five decades. Issues that warrant social action involve varied strategic

⁴Cf. Mohan, Brij. 2018. *The Future of Social Work: Seven Pillars of Practice*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

⁵See Mohan, Brij. 2018. ‘George Will on target about academia,’ *The Advocate* (Opinion), September 18: 4B (theadvocate.com).

⁶Cf. Sarila, Narendra Singh. 2006. *The Shadows of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India’s Partition*. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers.

interventions. A *Letter to the Editor* is a veritable instrument to refute, protest and participate in public discourse. My Letters have appeared in *Time*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Republic*, *The Morning Advocate* (now *The Advocate*), *Pioneer*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Journal of Social Work Education*⁷. A single step toward progress is much better than a thousand yards of success. "Success is not progress," famously wrote Sartre. Only a live fish can swim against the current.

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⁶https://www.academia.edu/8752705/Letter_to_the_Editor_JoSWE_CSWE (JoSWE, 50: 1-2, 2014); <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2014.947167>