

Decoding the Pledge

India is my
country and all
Indians are my
Brothers and
Sisters.

Conditions apply to our
love for our country people

Because what if their
reason for being Indian
isn't fuelled by a love
and willingness to die
for this nation?

What if their prayers
are directed at someone
not found in the
Bhagavad Gita?

What if their
motivation to fight for
this country at the
border isn't their
patriotic duty?

What if they choose to
identify beyond the
binary and *gasp*
rediscover their
sexuality?

Because what if they're not
truly our country people?

Would these questions
still escape your lips

If this person could
rattle off the *Gayatri*
Mantra with great ease

And tell you their last
name was Shah?

Would you still look at
them the same way

If they told you their
preferred pronouns

Or confided in you their
"abnormal" sexual
preferences?

Would you still question
their reasons, their
prayers, their motivations

If they chose Singh over
Bismil?

I love my
country and I
am proud of its
rich and varied
heritage.

Except, you know, the
heritage that left us with
states with names such as
Allahabad

The heritage that grew
into the 21st century along
with the rest of the world

Or as you call it,
westernisation

The heritage that gave the
world the language of love

Or as you think of it, vile
displays of sexuality

The heritage that
preached a land where
all beings are equal

Or as you practice it,
treating citizens of this
land a specific way based
on the caste they list on
a form.

**I shall always
strive to be
worthy of it.**

Who determines an
Indian's worth?

Who gave a mortal human
the right to decide another
human's worthiness?

Who set up the pedestal
for this lofty being to
climb and place
themselves at the top of
the food chain?

We breathe a limited
number of breaths

Further limited by laws
that upend our freedom

And question our place
with the constitution.

We live a limited
number of days

Further limited by
barbaric acts of
religious extremism

That rip apart the very
fibre of this nation.

I shall give
respect to my
parents, teachers
and all the elders
and treat
everyone with
courtesy.

Where was the courtesy
when you stripped us of
our democratic right to
free speech?

Where was the courtesy
when you came at us,
sticks brandished, blood
waiting to be shed?

Where was this courtesy
when you labelled us all
anti-national because
YOU chose to "cleanse"
this country of "filth"

While you stood there
with blood on your
hands and division on
your mind?

To my country
and my people,
I pledge my
devotion.

But my devotion now
comes with conditions.

Yes, I'm here.

But I'm standing my
ground.

Come at me if you wish.

I'm backed by an army of
voices that are tired of
being silenced

And beating hearts that
know where this country's
true worth lies.

I'm here.

I'm standing my ground.

While my country's
siblings ask for *azaadi*
with me, I'll keep watching
and protecting because

In their well
being and
prosperity
alone, lies my
happiness.

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