## Decoding he 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 pation?

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?
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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?

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 courtesu.

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

being silenced

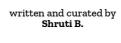
And beating hearts that

true worth lies.

know where this country's

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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