
Alive in Love

Vidya

Abstract

Alive in Love is a compilation of three journal entries from different moments in my lifetime when I have experienced immense heartbreak due to experiencing immense love. These narratives explore my understanding of love over the years, how it factors into both my work as a PhD student and into my overall positionality on love as a queer woman of colour, bringing into question the notion of love as ontological—as a singular, all-consuming reality. The piece questions whether the nature of my love - the way I experience and understand love from my subjugated standpoint, is graspable through the structure of colonial language, or any language, for that matter. Each entry formulates love within and outside the western categorical understandings of love as either romantic, platonic, or affectionate as simple, raw, unrefined expressions of the different forms of love that exist and the heartbreak that follows.

Keywords

love, heartbreak, grief, positionality, ontologies, ontology

Prelude

What is the status of love and heartbreak in the contemporary world? What do love and heartbreak do? Who gets to give love, experience love, and receive love? Who gets to grieve heartbreak? What kinds of heartbreaks and love can we grieve? This collection of journal entries explores various kinds of heartbreak caused throughout many years, in vastly different contexts – heartbreak that adds up, piles up; heartbreak that questions love, heartbreak that brings into understanding whether love is rational, beyond reason; heartbreak that breaks in and out of reason; heartbreak that is of a nation. As a South Asian queer woman who studies the Partition of India¹, heartbreak is an everyday experience for me. However, in this multi-sited narrative, I write of one narrative of heartbreak: the stories of which that go in and out of the past, present, and future. Stories such as this rupture the presumed linearity of experience to create a sense of the anarchic potential of love and heartbreak. How it transgresses everything.

As a site of this temporal transgression, my journal entries are written in the order of the most recent to the oldest. As I move back in time in my memories, the length of each entry reduces. This is a creative choice. The reduction in length and depth allows me to express the newness of the heartache, the temporality of it, along with the degree of it. Temporality as a concept here denotes both my heartache and love through/over time, but also how time in its past, present, and future articulations are tied together through heartbreak (Gokmenoglu, 2022, p.644-645). The oldest entry, the shortest one, is the heartache that is the deepest. I continue to lose parts of myself to that heartache as I live. With this, I evoke temporality to highlight the connection between time and the pace at which my heart beats in love and through heartbreak. The faster my heartbeats, the slower the time passes.

One. Love of a Lifetime, All Gone!

December 22nd, 2022

The dark of 4 a.m. is settling. The silence of 4 a.m. is unsettling. The hurt of 4 a.m. is heartbreaking. In the dark, unsettling, hurt, you lay next to me, I hear voices, I see words, I hear your words that will remain unsaid, forever. I want you to hold me. I want you to hold me forever. I want you to hold me so you can understand me. I want you to hold me through the heartbreak, the heartbreak you have caused. I want you to see me. I see your eyes closing at 4 a.m., I see you turn your back to me. The eyes closing and the back turning like a metaphor.

A metaphor for dismissal, disrespect, for unending hurt. For you taking me for granted. I want to touch you even though all the disrespect, the hurt, the crudeness is telling me not to. I want to feel safe. I think to myself - how can I feel safe with the one person who has caused me so much hurt, who has broken my trust? How can I forget all the pain in just one moment? I want you to hold me, despite that. I want you to hold me with care, hold me with love, hold me with respect. Hold me back with everything you stripped me of, in one night. I slowly, nervously move towards you. I touch you; I caress your back. I have known my touch to have calmed you, to have opened you up to me, but now, I see you shrug my hand away. I am crushed with shame. Days later, I will realize that I have also caused you hurt, I have caused you some pain. Days later, I will realize that the hurt led me to learn and unlearn things about myself. I hope to share those and take accountability for what I did with you someday. I hope I can. I do. Excerpts of our phone conversation are copied below.

I want to do this with care. I want to do this with a lot of acceptance and kindness. I also want to remind you again that I am going to talk about how I felt during and after the conversation from a week ago and I will mention feelings of hurt, pain, heartbreak even, but none of them have led to resentment of you or hatred of you. I do not at all, for once, blame you for it. They do not stem

¹ Learn more: www.1947partitionarchive.org/library.

from your decision. I respect it, I understand it, I, to an extent, agree with it, and I do not want to talk today to convince you to change your mind or induce guilt. I want to talk because I realized that somewhere in the last few months, we forgot what we mean to each other and how much love we have for one another. I want to talk today so we can start again with so much knowledge about the other person, start again with care, without expectations, with understanding, without restrictions. Is that okay, how are you feeling so far? I also want us to keep checking in. And, at any moment, if you feel that this is turning into a game of blame, please tell me to stop and I will take a step back to reframe. There are parts where I want you to take accountability for wrongdoing, and I will too, where needed.

I want to tell you how I really, truly understand your positionality. I agree. Over the last few days, I spent a lot of time thinking, reading, writing. All to understand why we had a disagreement. I felt very unsettled, incredibly sad, very hurt. But I knew that I didn't feel all of that because of you or your decision. So, I did a very deliberate, intentional digging, deeper and backward, to understand the how, the why, and the what next. I read about love, philosophically, chemically, anthropologically. I read Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Martha Nussbaum, bell hooks. I read papers on the anthropology of love, I read Deleuze and Sara Ahmed as the contemporary masters of love in affect theory.

I really dug deep into my heart and brain. I asked myself questions like; do I even love you? Am I just attached to you? Is it just physical or sexual attraction? Is it just convenience - as once you had deduced it was - had I loved you for the proximity and convenience of it? And, now, I have come upon the answer - I do love you, I love you beyond what words can describe. What kind of love then? Platonic, romantic, purely sexual? My love for you is affective, spiritual. It is beyond all of it and therefore it encompasses all of it. I love you beyond friendship, romance, or relationships, and I love you as kin, as a kindred spirit - it surpasses any categorization, it surpasses distance, time, everything. I have love

for you at any given moment, on any given day.

Even when I was so deeply hurt, I could not physically stop loving you. My love for you both precedes and exceeds any love that I have had before. It precedes and exceeds relationship, friendship, it is a cellular, deep love. That depth is the very reason I have struggled with its expression, with conveying it in the past and now. So, it is a love of affective, spiritual relationality, not romantic relationships as we know it, it is about the connection that occurred even before I had met you, frankly. You were someone familiar to me in September 2021, and I knew I loved you on Jan 9th, 2022. My love will always be there, relationship or not. friendship or not.

You can decide to walk away from any connection, and I will still love you. The lack of expression of it will cause sadness and deep heartbreak, but the love will not go. I think of it as a universal miracle that I met you, someone who understands my bones, my cells, my spirit, and my soul. Someone who resides in them even, as cringey as this may sound. Saying I love you to you, holding you, kissing you, having sex with you are all expressions for the kind of depth I experience. Sex, especially, is so much about vulnerability, connection, and nurturance. I will feel this way, the connection, with or without a relationship because I have always felt this with you. I think I was trying to hold on to a notion of commitment towards a relationship because I was acting from a place of fear and scarcity. Because I learnt over the summer that you will not be comfortable with expressions of love, if not for a relationship. It is what you wanted.

So, this is where I stand. I want it all with you, so I will be here. Not waiting and pining, but as an old tree that stays for a long time. You take what you want from it. Because I don't agree with societal restrictions of when I can love you, how I can love you, I will always love you, however you want me to. If you need rebound sex, I will be here, if you need a shoulder to cry on, I will be here, if you need sex because you haven't had any in a long time, I will be here, if you need to vent about your partner, your parents, I will be here.

My only condition is, I get to express my love

for you, how I want. I cannot be shamed for it. I cannot be ridiculed for it. Just because we do that, does not mean we are in a relationship. Sending you hugs or squeezes means you are in my thoughts, and I want my warmth for you. When I say I am thinking of you, I mean it as I am grateful for you in my life. I have spent too much time trying to bind my love for people, to reduce it, to categorize it, to dial it down. You are far too important for me to do that. So, I will fight for you, I will fight for your love for you. Fight against societal norms. I wish you would fight for me, your love for me. But you do not. You break my heart, again. But, my love stays, again.

Yours,
Vidya.

Two. Heartache of a Nation, for a Nation.
May 28th, 2020

I am 24 today. I am happy about that. I am heartbroken, very deeply, about the Partition. I am heartbroken about the split of a nation, a people, of togetherness that happened seventy-three years ago. I am only now fully reconciling with it. I am only now understanding the degree of heartbreak that occurred decades ago. The heartbreak that has never healed. I lay in bed, on the 28th day of May, the day I turned 24, thinking about the heartbreak, learning it, feeling it. How did I not know about the Partition? How did I not know about the millions of deaths, the violence, the cries? How can I be happy today? How can I ever be happy? My heart started peeling away, peeling slowly like the petals of a flower would. Almost three years later, I still haven't found the words, the feelings, the emotions to express the pain, the grief, the love. Love for a nation unknown, yet so familiar. Love for Pakistan.

On the 28th day of May, while lying in bed, I decided to learn everything there is about the Partition. Today, as I rewrite aspects of this journal entry to submit for a journal, I am exploring the Partition through an anthropology of love, looking at the cultural politics of heartbreak and love for my PhD thesis. This is my way of learning, articulating, and healing through

the heartbreak of the Partition. A heartbreak that generations of families in two nations share. Some of us have never experienced the Partition itself, having only experienced the effects of the heartbreak. None of us being allowed to publicly acknowledge or express the heartbreak.

A heartbreak that connects and divides us. My heart aches for my country, for the country that became the other, for the people of my country, and for the ones in the neighbouring country. The love for my country, for the country that became the other, is just as powerful. So is the shame for my country, her politics, her government, and the divisive, fascist propaganda the government is spewing. I promise myself that I will always keep the heartache close to my heart, I will keep it with me every day. I promise to feel it every day. For almost three years now, I felt it every day. I have been with heartache every day.

Yours truly,
Vidya.

Three. No Love to Live For!
June 13th, 2006

I am jolted awake at 2 a.m. It is the kind of jolt that is ominous. I am 10 years old, I still co-sleep with my parents. I do not see them around, and immediately, I know. I know that it is you. I dreamt of you walking away from me. I run to your room and see you sleeping, very very still. I know you are gone, but my parents and my grandfather cannot muster up the courage to tell me that, to confirm or actualize it for me.

They know how much I love you. I wish you know how much I love you. You are gone. My world has torn apart. I want to scream, I want to cry, I want to die. What is the point of life and living if you are not in it. It has been 17 years since you are gone, and my heart has never healed. My world has not been put together. I have had the desire to die, every single day. And yet my love stays. You stay in my love.

Yours forever,
Vidya.

Postlude

These entries lead me to ask if I love so deeply, and continue to love so deeply, because I am expected to always care, love, understand, as a woman of colour? Is my love, or my ability to love, a consequence of colonization? I will explore these questions in future entries.

Collaboration Request

To continue the journalistic nature of these entries and my explorations of love and heartbreak, I ask the readers, if willing, and interested, to write their thoughts on love and heartbreak or to offer their thoughts on some of the questions I pose. I plan/hope to create paintings/montages out of the entries in a shared, co-curated manner, to celebrate the ambiguous, ever-expanding nature of love. If interested in the collaboration, email vishjo@yorku.ca with your responses, thoughts on love, and/or more questions. I will also add any paintings/montages provided through these explorations to my professional website, with credit.

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