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## Love and Its Formations According to Different Civilizations: A Philosophical and Sociological Analysis

*Ařk ve Farklı Uygarlıklara Gre Biimleri: Felsefi ve Sosyolojik Bir Analiz*



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### Abstract

Love has historically been one of the most persistent and transformative themes in both individual experience and intellectual history. A psychological conceptualized as a metaphysical force, an ethical concern, and a psychological impulse, love has also functioned as a culturally regulated social phenomenon shaped by institutions, moral systems, and gender norms. This article offers a conceptual and comparative analysis of love by tracing its philosophical definitions, its civilizational transformations in Western and Islamic traditions, and its sociological reformulations in late modernity. Drawing on key theoretical perspectives-especially Giddens's notion of the "pure relationship," Bauman's theory of "liquid love," and Illouz's analysis of "emotional capitalism"-the study argues that love has shifted from religious-metaphysical frameworks toward forms increasingly mediated by modern institutions, consumer culture, and reflexive self-identity. The article concludes that love remains both an existential constant and a historically variable social construction, deeply intertwined with the production of intimacy, the regulation of sexuality, and the cultural reproduction of gender.

**Keywords:** Sociology of Religion, Sociology of Love, Intimacy, Modernity, Emotional Capitalism, Liquid Love, Giddens, Bauman.

### Highlights

- Since it treats love not merely as an individual emotion but as a historical and social phenomenon, it helps explain why love has become so fragile and complex in the modern World.
- Since it brings together Western philosophy, Islamic thought, and contemporary sociology, it offers a comparative and in-depth perspective on the civilizational transformation of love.
- By drawing on contemporary theorists such as Giddens, Bauman, and Illouz, it explains why modern relationships operate through notions of temporariness, disposability, and market logic, providing a theoretical framework for current relationship problems.
- Through the comparison of Schopenhauer and Erich Fromm, it adds intellectual depth to the question of whether love is a deterministic biological force or an ethical and learnable human capacity.

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- By linking love to religion, morality, gender, power, and the economy, it goes beyond romantic discourse and offers a critical and original contribution to the social sciences.

### Öz

Aşk, tarihsel olarak hem bireysel deneyimde ve hem de düşünce tarihinde en süreklilik gösteren ve en dönüştürücü temalardan biri olmuştur. Metafizik bir güç, etik bir sorun ve psikolojik bir dürtü olarak kavramsallaştırılmasının yanı sıra aşk, kurumlar, ahlaki sistemler ve toplumsal cinsiyet normları tarafından şekillendirilen, kültürel olarak düzenlenen bir toplumsal olgu olarak da işlev görmüştür. Bu makale, aşkın felsefi tanımlarını, Batı ve İslam medeniyetlerindeki uygarlık temelli dönüşümlerini ve geç modern dönemdeki sosyolojik yeniden formülasyonlarını izleyerek kavramsal ve karşılaştırmalı bir analiz sunmaktadır. Özellikle Giddens'in "saf ilişki" kavramı, Bauman'ın "akışkan aşk" teorisi ve Illouz'un "duygusal kapitalizm" analizine dayanan çalışma, aşkın dinî-metafizik çerçevelerden giderek modern kurumlar, tüketim kültürü ve reflektif benlik kimliği tarafından aracılanan biçimlere doğru kaydığını ileri sürmektedir. Makale, aşkın hem varoluşsal bir sabite hem de tarihsel olarak değişken bir toplumsal inşa olmaya devam ettiği; mahremiyetin üretimi, cinselliğin düzenlenmesi ve toplumsal cinsiyetin kültürel yeniden üretimiyle derin bir biçimde iç içe geçtiği sonucuna ulaşmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din Sosyolojisi, Aşk Sosyolojisi, Mahremiyet, Modernite, Duygusal Kapitalizm, Akışkan Aşk, Giddens, Bauman.

### Öne Çıkanlar

- Aşkı sadece bireysel bir duygu değil, tarihsel ve toplumsal bir olgu olarak ele aldığı için modern dünyada aşkın neden bu kadar kırılmalı ve karmaşık hale geldiğini anlamayı sağlar.
- Batı felsefesi, İslam düşüncesi ve çağdaş sosyolojiyi birlikte ele aldığı için aşkın medeniyetler arası dönüşümünü karşılaştırmalı ve derinlikli biçimde görme imkânı sunar.
- Giddens, Bauman ve Illouz gibi çağdaş kuramcılar üzerinden modern ilişkilerin neden "geçici", "tüketilebilir" ve "piyasa mantığıyla" işlediğini açıklayarak güncel ilişki sorunlarına teorik bir çerçeve kazandırır.
- Schopenhauer ve Erich Fromm karşılaştırması sayesinde aşkın kaderci-biyolojik bir zorunluluk mu yoksa etik ve öğrenilebilir bir insan yetisi mi olduğu sorusuna düşünsel bir derinlik kazandırır.
- Aşkı din, ahlak, cinsiyet, iktidar ve ekonomiyle ilişkilendirerek onu romantik söylemin ötesine taşıyan, akademik ve eleştirel bir perspektif sunduğu için sosyal bilimlere açısından özgün bir katkı sağlar.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Love occupies a paradoxical position in human history: it is at once deeply personal and profoundly social, seemingly spontaneous yet culturally structured. Across civilizations, love has been framed as a moral virtue, a metaphysical longing, a divine path, a social duty, and a psychological drive. The ways in which love has been understood and practiced have always been closely linked to broader civilizational structures—such as religious doctrines, philosophical worldviews, family institutions, and gender regimes.

In Turkish intellectual and cultural history, love has not only been narrated through literary traditions (e.g., folk poetry) but also theorized through philosophical and mystical discourses. Building upon conceptual definitions provided by Ahmet Cevizci (2000) and historical observations in cultural accounts such as Tok (2001), this article examines the transformation of love across cultural worlds and proposes a sociological interpretation grounded in late modern theories.

The central aim is twofold: (1) to outline major historical and philosophical formulations of love, and (2) to situate love within contemporary sociological theory,

highlighting how intimacy is reshaped under the pressures of modernity, consumerism, and emotional rationalization (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 1997; 2012).

**Ethical Statement:** This study was conducted in accordance with all ethical standards. The information and findings presented in this article have been documented in compliance with the principles of honesty and transparency. The authors have maintained scientific integrity and objectivity at every stage of the research. In addition, all sources used in this study have been appropriately cited. Since the research is based on document analysis, ethics committee approval is not required.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Conceptual Definitions of Love and Philosophical Context

Ahmet Cevizci defines love as “an emotional bond that draws and binds the individual toward a particular being, object, or universal value,” emphasizing love as an intense devotion directed toward the highest being or beauty (Cevizci, 2000). According to Cevizci, love entered philosophy primarily through religious frameworks-especially when existence was interpreted as the creative act of God and love was framed as a supreme force shaping the cosmos (Cevizci, 2000). Love, however, also emerges as a moral and ethical concern: as one of the strongest human impulses, it has often been considered a power that must be disciplined and controlled (Cevizci, 2000).

This dual characteristic of love-metaphysical and moral-suggests that it cannot be reduced to emotion alone. Rather, love constitutes a conceptual field through which societies organize desire, legitimacy, and interpersonal expectations.

### 2.2. Encyclopedic and Literary Approaches to Love

Encyclopedic traditions also offer influential definitions. *Meydan Larousse* describes love as “a powerful bodily or spiritual emotion that directs one sex toward another” (*Meydan Larousse*, n.d., 2/225). The same source highlights poetic formulations, such as Cenap Şahabettin’s statement “Love is the impolite guest of our heart,” and Tanpınar’s definition of love as “the beating of the heart toward an attractive person or thing” (*Meydan Larousse*, n.d., 2/225–226). These formulations underline love’s involuntary nature and its directness toward an object.

Furthermore, Descartes’s division of love into two types (a) love that leads to benevolence and (b) love that leads to possession-suggests that love’s moral value depends on the orientation of desire (*Meydan Larousse*, n.d., 2/226). Such distinctions remain sociologically relevant because they reflect how societies classify love as virtuous or deviant.

### 2.3. Historical Transformations in Western Thought

In Ancient Greek thought, love was connected to ideals of beauty and harmony, and pagan contexts tended to perceive erotic love as natural (Tok, 2001). However, with the dominance of Christianity in medieval Europe, love was increasingly moralized and

disciplined. Bodily desire was associated with sin, and women were frequently positioned as temptations linked to original sin (Tok, 2001). Consequently, marriage became the primary legitimate form of intimacy, while romantic desire was often restricted.

In modernity, Freud's interpretation shifted focus to libido and sexuality. Freud conceptualized love partly as libidinal investment in a sexual object; yet such investments tend to become more enduring as desires re-emerge, producing a lasting structure of affection (Freud, 1997). This perspective emphasizes the entanglement of love and sexuality and raises questions about how social institutions regulate both.

#### **2.4. Religious Traditions: Augustine and Sufism**

In Christian philosophy, Augustine regards love as rooted in human imperfection: humans seek love because they are incomplete. While people may love material things or other humans, the ultimate object of love is God, the only being capable of fulfilling humanity's longing for infinity (Cevizci, 2000).

In Islamic intellectual history, love reaches a central status within Sufi philosophy. According to Sufi thought, God created the universe because He loved to be known; thus, existence itself is founded upon knowledge and love (Cevizci, 2000). Sufis distinguish between transient (metaphorical) love and true (divine) love; earthly affection functions as a bridge toward ultimate devotion (Cevizci, 2000). Tahirü'l-Mevlevî further describes love as an all-encompassing force, like ivy that wraps around the human heart and body, suggesting that no particle of existence is free from love (Tahirü'l-Mevlevî, 1963).

### **3. SOCIOLOGY OF LOVE: EXPANDED THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

The sociology of love emerged as a distinctive area of inquiry when sociologists began to treat love not merely as a private emotion or biological drive, but as a socially patterned experience shaped by institutions, norms, cultural scripts, economic arrangements, and power relations. In this regard, love is neither purely individual nor purely universal; it is simultaneously an affective reality and a historically contingent social form. Contemporary sociological debates highlight that modern love is increasingly entwined with the dynamics of individualization, consumer culture, risk, gender regimes, and the governance of intimacy.

#### **3.1. A Comparative Analysis of Schopenhauer's and Erich Fromm's Theories of Love**

Love and affection have occupied a central position in the history of philosophy and the social sciences, both as fundamental dimensions of individual experience and as structuring elements of social order. While some thinkers have conceptualized love as a metaphysical necessity beyond human agency, others have interpreted it as an ethical capacity shaped through socialization and practice.

This study aims to provide a comparative analysis of Arthur Schopenhauer's *on Love and Women* and Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving* and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. The

main research question guiding this analysis is as follows: Is love a biological–metaphysical force that transcends individual will, or is it an ethical and practical capacity that can be learned and cultivated?

Within this framework, the pessimistic and essentialist approach of Schopenhauer will be contrasted with Fromm’s humanistic and productive conception of love.

### **3.1.1. Love and the Metaphysics of the Species in Arthur Schopenhauer**

#### **3.1.1.1. Ontological Reflections on Women and Gender**

In *On Love and Women*, Schopenhauer addresses relations between the sexes primarily through biological and metaphysical premises. Women are frequently portrayed as intellectually and morally inferior to men, with their primary function being the preservation of the species (Schopenhauer, 2012). According to Schopenhauer, women are oriented toward the present moment, lack abstract reasoning, and are therefore unsuited for what he considers “great intellectual or moral endeavors.”

This approach treats gender difference not as a historical or social construct, but as a fixed law of nature. Schopenhauer further claims that women possess a weaker sense of justice and honesty, and that cunning and dissimulation are innate defensive traits compensating for their physical weakness (Schopenhauer, 2012). From a contemporary perspective, such claims clearly reflect an essentialist and hierarchical conception of gender.

#### **3.1.1.2. The Metaphysics of Sexual Love: The Deception of the Individual**

At the core of Schopenhauer’s theory of love lies the concept of the “will of the species.” According to him, what individuals experience as passionate love is in fact the species exercising its power over individuals for the sake of reproduction (Schopenhauer, 2012). Love is not a conscious or rational choice aimed at individual happiness, but a biological necessity disguised as romantic fulfillment.

Schopenhauer argues that the idea of “spiritual harmony” between lovers is largely illusory. In reality, what attracts individuals to one another is an unconscious calculation aimed at producing the most suitable offspring (Schopenhauer, 2012). The disappointment often experienced after marriage or the fulfillment of love is thus explained as the inevitable collapse of this illusion once the purpose of the species has been served.

#### **3.1.1.3. The Tragic Consequences of Love**

Schopenhauer emphasizes the destructive potential of love, noting that individuals frequently act against their own interests under its influence. Love can lead to irrational sacrifices, personal ruin, and, in extreme cases, suicide (Schopenhauer, 2012). From this perspective, love appears as both an irresistible force and a tragic deception, reinforcing Schopenhauer’s broader philosophical pessimism.



Schopenhauer's approach is deterministic and pessimistic, portraying love as a source of illusion and suffering. Fromm, by contrast, adopts a normative and transformative perspective, viewing love as humanity's most promising response to alienation and loneliness.

This comparison has demonstrated the profound theoretical divergence between Schopenhauer's metaphysics of love and Fromm's humanistic theory of love. While Schopenhauer interprets love as an instrument of the species that deceives and exploits individuals, Fromm conceptualizes love as a learned art and an ethical orientation capable of overcoming isolation and destructiveness.

The contrast between these two perspectives provides a valuable theoretical framework for rethinking love not merely as a private emotion, but as a phenomenon deeply embedded in philosophical anthropology and social theory.

### **3.2. Giddens: Reflexive Modernity, "Pure Relationships" and the Transformation of Intimacy**

Anthony Giddens argues that love in late modern societies is profoundly reshaped by processes of reflexivity and detraditionalization (Giddens, 1992). Traditional societies, he suggests, structured intimacy through kinship systems, religious authority, and community surveillance. By contrast, modernity increasingly turns intimacy into a domain of self-construction. Love becomes part of the project of the self-an arena where personal identity is continuously negotiated.

Giddens introduces the concept of the pure relationship, defined as a relationship entered for its own sake, sustained only as long as both partners obtain sufficient satisfaction. This relational form depends on emotional communication, mutual disclosure, and negotiation; it is less anchored in external obligation than in internal fulfillment. Love becomes a "reflexive project," requiring continuous emotional labor and self-monitoring (Giddens, 1992).

This shift transforms marriage itself. Rather than being primarily an economic institution or a moral duty, marriage becomes a space where individuals pursue emotional authenticity, sexual satisfaction, and psychological well-being. In this sense, modern romantic love functions as a powerful cultural narrative: it legitimizes intimate bonds, but also produces instability, as relationships become contingent upon ongoing satisfaction.

### **3.3. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim: Individualization and the "Normal Chaos of Love"**

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim deepen this analysis by linking love to the structural transformations of late modernity (Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). They argue that individualization dismantles traditional life trajectories and replaces them with biographical uncertainty. In earlier social formations, life courses were relatively predictable: marriage, family, gender roles, and labor were institutionally anchored. In late modernity, individuals

are compelled to “write their own biographies,” and intimate relationships become key sources of meaning, stability, and identity.

Yet this also produces what they call the “normal chaos of love.” Love becomes loaded with expectations: it is expected to provide emotional security, self-realization, sexual satisfaction, and companionship all at once. When relationships fail to meet these heightened expectations, disappointment becomes structurally likely rather than exceptional (Beck - Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Thus, modern love becomes both more central and more fragile.

#### **3.4. Bauman: Liquid Love, Consumer Culture, and Disposable Bonds**

Zygmunt Bauman describes modern intimacy through the concept of liquid modernity, where the defining cultural value is flexibility (Bauman, 2003). In such a social environment, stable commitments are perceived as risky because they restrict mobility. Bauman argues that contemporary individuals desire closeness but fear entrapment. The result is a relational landscape shaped by ambivalence: individuals want connection without permanence.

Bauman’s concept of liquid love emphasizes that relationships increasingly resemble consumer commodities—selected, used, and replaced. Love becomes a form of investment governed by risk management: individuals calculate emotional costs and benefits, seeking maximum pleasure with minimal vulnerability. Consequently, intimacy becomes fragile, and trust becomes harder to sustain.

#### **3.5. Illouz: Emotional Capitalism, Romance as a Cultural Industry, and the Marketization of Intimacy**

Eva Illouz’s work provides one of the most influential sociological critiques of modern romantic culture. Illouz argues that capitalism does not simply shape material life; it also organizes emotional life. Through advertising, media narratives, dating practices, and therapeutic discourse, emotional experience is increasingly standardized, commercialized, and scripted (Illouz, 1997; 2012).

Illouz uses the notion of emotional capitalism to explain how romantic subjectivity is shaped by the market. Love becomes entangled with consumption: restaurants, gifts, travel, leisure, and lifestyle commodities become tools for performing romance. Moreover, popular culture supplies “templates” that teach individuals how love should feel and how relationships should unfold.

In *Why Love Hurts*, Illouz further shows how romantic suffering is structurally produced by gendered inequalities and by the asymmetry of choice in modern dating markets (Illouz, 2012). Love becomes painful not merely because of personal failure but because contemporary romantic selection is shaped by broader social hierarchies—such as class, attractiveness norms, professional status, and gender expectations.

### **3.6. Bourdieu: Love, Taste and the Reproduction of Social Class**

Pierre Bourdieu's sociology offers a crucial complement to the above theories by emphasizing the role of class, cultural capital, and habitus in romantic selection. While love often presents itself as spontaneous and "free," Bourdieu's framework suggests that partner choice is strongly patterned by social structure. Individuals tend to form relationships within similar social classes because of their tastes, lifestyles, and cultural competencies align (Bourdieu, 1984).

In this sense, love operates as a hidden mechanism of social reproduction. Romance is shaped by the embodied dispositions of habitus: what one finds attractive, desirable, or "appropriate" is socially produced rather than purely personal. The cultural practices associated with romance-speech styles, leisure preferences, aesthetic taste-function as markers of class belonging. Thus, love becomes a domain in which inequality is reproduced under the appearance of personal freedom.

### **3.7. Luhmann: Love as Communication and the Coding of Intimacy**

Niklas Luhmann approaches love not as emotion but as a communication system. For Luhmann, love is a symbolic code that enables individuals to communicate intimacy (Luhmann, 1986). Modern societies, he argues, require specific ways of expressing closeness, trust, and vulnerability. Love functions as a medium for making personal experience socially legible.

From this perspective, love is not simply felt but performed through culturally available languages: declarations, rituals, expectations, and relationship narratives. Love provides a framework through which individuals interpret their own emotions and regulate interpersonal boundaries. Luhmann's approach is especially useful for analyzing how societies create "rules of intimacy" and how changes in cultural communication reshape what love means.

### **3.8. Hochschild: Emotional Labor, Gender, and the Management of Feeling**

Arlie Hochschild's theory introduces a powerful lens for analyzing love through the concept of emotional labor, the work of managing feelings to meet social expectations (Hochschild, 1983). Although Hochschild developed this idea primarily in relation to service work, it has been widely applied to intimate relationships.

In romantic and familial life, individuals often regulate their emotions to maintain harmony, show care, or perform affection. Importantly, this emotional labor is unequally distributed: women, across many societies, carry a disproportionate burden of relationship management, emotional support, and caregiving (Hochschild, 1983). This makes love a gendered field of labor rather than a purely mutual affective bond.

Hochschild's approach helps explain why relationships are often experienced as exhausting and why love can become a site of emotional exploitation. Love becomes not only something one feels, but something one does-often under unequal conditions.

### **3.9. Foucault: Sexuality, Power and the Governance of Intimacy**

Michel Foucault's work is foundational for sociological analyses of sexuality and intimacy (Foucault, 1978). Foucault argues that modern societies regulate sexuality not only through prohibition but through the production of discourse: science, religion, medicine, and institutions generate norms about what counts as "healthy," "normal," and "moral" intimacy.

Within this framework, love cannot be separated from power. Romantic and sexual desires are shaped by regimes of knowledge that define acceptable relationships, gender roles, and family structures. This perspective is crucial for linking love to broader processes of governance: love becomes a site where individuals internalize social norms and discipline their bodies and desires. From a Foucauldian view, "intimacy" is a politically regulated domain rather than a purely private matter.

### **3.10. Synthesis: From Metaphysical Love to Sociological Love**

Taken together, these theories suggest that love has become a privileged site through which modern societies organize identity, morality, gender, consumption, and power.

- According to Arthur Schopenhauer, love is not an ethical or emotional relationship freely chosen by the individual, but the manifestation of a blind and metaphysical will that uses the individual through illusion to ensure the continuation of the species.
- According to Erich Fromm, love is a productive capacity of love that can be learned, requiring effort and ethical responsibility, and constitutes the human response to the problem of loneliness and alienation.
- Giddens emphasize love as reflexive self-project and negotiated intimacy.
- Beck & Beck-Gernsheim show how love becomes structurally chaotic under individualization.
- Bauman diagnoses the fragility of bonds in liquid modernity.
- Illouz reveals the commodification and market logic shaping romantic subjectivity.
- Bourdieu highlights class reproduction and hidden structural constraints in partner choice.
- Luhmann conceptualizes love as communicative code and cultural performance.
- Hochschild shows the unequal emotional labor that sustains intimacy.
- Foucault reveals the normative governance of sexuality and the politics of private life.

These sociological perspectives complement the civilizational discussion in this article. They show that love, while historically expressed through metaphysical and religious

language (e.g., Augustine’s divine love, Sufi metaphysics), becomes increasingly institutionalized through modern mechanisms: the market, media, therapeutic discourse, and individualization. Love remains existentially meaningful, yet it is ever more socially constructed, regulated through cultural scripts and shaped by structural inequalities.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This article employs a qualitative conceptual methodology based on (a) literature review and (b) comparative conceptual analysis. The study synthesizes philosophical definitions, historical narratives, and sociological theories to interpret love as a civilizational and social phenomenon. Primary reference points include Turkish philosophical sources (Cevizci, 2000), cultural-historical narratives (Tok, 2001), psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1997), Sufi commentary (Tahirü’l-Mevlevî, 1963), and contemporary sociological theories of intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 1997; 2012).

#### **5. FINDINGS**

The analysis yields several major findings:

1. Love is both universal and historically variable. While the experience of love persists across cultures, its meanings shift according to religious doctrines, moral systems, and social institutions.
2. Civilizational frameworks shape moral classifications of love. Pagan antiquity tends to normalize erotic desire, whereas medieval Christianity moralizes it through sin and discipline (Tok, 2001).
3. Modernity redefines love through sexuality, selfhood, and intimacy. Psychoanalytic frameworks (Freud, 1997) and late modern sociology (Giddens, 1992) show that love becomes tied to identity and emotional fulfillment.
4. Late modern love is increasingly fragile and market mediated. Bauman’s (2003) “liquid love” and Illouz’s (1997, 2012) “emotional capitalism” reveal how commitment weakens as consumer logic and emotional rationalization intensify.
5. Sufi Thought offers an alternative civilizational model. Unlike purely romantic or consumer-driven frameworks, Sufism interprets love as a metaphysical pathway in which earthly attachment transforms into divine devotion (Cevizci, 2000; Tahirü’l-Mevlevî, 1963).

#### **6. DISCUSSION**

These findings suggest that love cannot be understood purely as emotion or instinct; it is a social construction that evolves through civilizational structures. Giddens’s “pure relationship” illustrates how love in modern societies becomes dependent upon reflexive self-identity and communicative competence (Giddens, 1992). Yet Bauman’s analysis warns that the same modern conditions produce insecurity and disposability, leading to unstable bonds

(Bauman, 2003). Illouz further explains that love becomes entangled with consumer culture and mediated through market-oriented narratives (Illouz, 1997; 2012). Together, these approaches highlight a key tension: modern individuals seek authenticity in love while living under institutional pressures that commodify intimacy.

Within this framework, youth and “love apprenticeships” become sociologically significant: early romantic experiences often reflect cultural scripts shaped by gender norms, social surveillance, and moral expectations. Love, therefore, participates in the reproduction of social order while also offering a space where norms can be negotiated and sometimes contested.

## 7. LOVE IN CIVILISATIONAL HISTORY

Love is one of the most fundamental emotional, cultural, and symbolic experiences in human history. This study aims to examine the historical transformation of love across civilizations from a comparative sociological perspective. By analyzing Ancient Greek and Roman thought, Eastern civilizations, Islamic philosophy, Medieval Europe, and modern and postmodern societies, the article demonstrates how love has been shaped by religious beliefs, philosophical frameworks, and social structures. The study argues that love should be understood not merely as a private emotion but as a socially constructed phenomenon embedded in cultural contexts.

Love has never been a purely personal or emotional experience detached from social life. Rather, it reflects the moral values, religious beliefs, and cultural structures of the societies in which it is experienced. Throughout history, love has been defined, regulated, idealized, or suppressed in accordance with dominant worldviews and social institutions.

This article examines the transformation of love across civilizations, focusing on how different societies conceptualized love in relation to knowledge, morality, spirituality, and social order. From Ancient Greece to postmodern consumer societies, love is analyzed as a dynamic social phenomenon shaped by historical and cultural conditions.

### 7.1. Love in Ancient Civilizations

In Ancient Greek philosophy, love occupied a central position in understanding human existence. The conceptual distinction between *Eros*, *Philia*, and *Agape* reveals a sophisticated framework in which love encompassed bodily desire, ethical friendship, and transcendent devotion. In Plato’s *Symposium*, love is portrayed as a motivating force that leads the soul from the realm of sensory experience to the contemplation of eternal and absolute truth.

By contrast, Ancient Roman society approached love in a more pragmatic and institutional manner. Marriage was primarily regarded as a mechanism for social stability, political alliances, and the continuation of lineage. Romantic love, although present, was

largely confined to literature and private life. This separation highlights the Roman tendency to distinguish between emotional intimacy and public responsibility.

### 7.2. Love in Eastern Civilizations

In Indian civilization, love was understood as both a worldly and a metaphysical experience. The concept of *Kama* acknowledged desire and pleasure as legitimate aspects of human life, while *Bhakti* emphasized devotion and unconditional love toward the divine. This dual structure illustrates an integrated worldview in which love contributes to both personal fulfillment and spiritual liberation.

In Chinese thought, particularly within Confucian philosophy, love was interpreted primarily through the lens of social harmony and moral duty. Familial loyalty, hierarchical relationships, and communal stability were prioritized over individual romantic desire. Love was therefore defined less by personal passion and more by its capacity to sustain ethical order and social cohesion.

### 7.3. Love in Islamic Civilization

Islamic thought conceptualizes love on two interconnected levels: metaphorical (human) love and divine love. While human love is recognized as a natural part of existence, it is often regarded as a reflection of a higher, transcendent reality. Moral responsibility and balance are emphasized in regulating emotional attachment.

Within Sufism, divine love (*ishq*) is considered a transformative force that enables the individual to transcend the ego and approach ultimate truth. Mystical figures such as Rumi and Yunus Emre describe love as the essence of existence and the primary path to spiritual purification. In this tradition, love functions as both an ethical and ontological principle.

### 7.4. Love in Medieval, Modern, and Postmodern Contexts

During the Middle Ages in Europe, under the influence of Christian theology, love was frequently associated with sin, temptation, and bodily weakness. Nevertheless, the tradition of courtly love idealized romantic devotion, emphasizing longing, sacrifice, and unattainability. This duality reflects the paradoxical position of love as both repressed and glorified.

In modern societies, the rise of individualism transformed love into the primary foundation of marriage and intimate relationships. Emotional compatibility and personal choice became central values. However, in postmodern societies, Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love" captures the increasing fragility and temporariness of relationships under the influence of consumer culture. Love is increasingly shaped by flexibility, uncertainty, and disposability.

The historical transformation of love demonstrates that it is not a fixed or universal emotion but a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts. From metaphysical elevation to moral regulation and consumerist

redefinition, love has continuously adapted to changing social realities. Understanding love through a civilizational perspective provides valuable insight into the broader dynamics of human societies.

**Table 1:** Comparative Table

Civilization / Period	Concept of Love	Dominant Dimension	Social Function
Ancient Greece	Path to truth and wisdom	Philosophical–Metaphysical	Ethical cultivation
Ancient Rome	Private emotion	Pragmatic–Institutional	Social order
Indian Civilization	Desire and devotion	Physical–Spiritual	Cosmic balance
Chinese Thought	Moral attachment	Social–Ethical	Social harmony
Islamic Civilization	Divine orientation	Mystical–Ontological	Moral purification
Medieval Europe	Suppressed / idealized	Theological	Control of desire
Modern Society	Emotional fulfillment	Individualistic	Basis of marriage
Postmodern Society	Liquid relationships	Consumerist	Temporary bonds

In Ancient Greek philosophy, love was not regarded merely as an emotional experience but as a force guiding the human soul toward truth and wisdom. Plato conceptualized love as a dynamic process through which the soul ascends from physical attraction to the contemplation of eternal forms (Plato, 1989). This interpretation situates love at the center of epistemological and ethical development.

Similarly, in the Sufi tradition of Islamic thought, love functions as a transformative power that enables the individual to transcend the ego and attain spiritual unity. Rumi portrays love as the primary means through which the self is purified and reoriented toward divine reality (Rumi, 2001). In this context, love becomes both an ethical discipline and an ontological journey.

### CONCLUSION

This article examined love through philosophical definitions, civilizational transformations, and sociological theories. The analysis demonstrates that love is both an existential constant and a historically mutable social phenomenon. Western history

illustrates shifts from pagan naturalization of desire to Christian moral discipline and finally to modern configurations shaped by sexuality, reflexivity, and consumer culture. In contrast, Islamic Sufi thought conceptualizes love as a metaphysical bridge from the transient to the eternal.

In contemporary modernity, love increasingly becomes a negotiated project (Giddens, 1992), a fragile bond (Bauman, 2003), and a commodified emotional experience (Illouz, 1997; 2012). Understanding love today requires attention to cultural norms, gender regimes, and the ways in which capitalism and media reshape emotional life. Future research may expand this conceptual work through empirical studies examining how youth in different cultural contexts internalize and experience love.

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