

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOVE: EXPLORING THE NOTION OF 'ISHQ' IN SUFI THOUGHT AND ITS INTERPLAY IN EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES



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Annotation. *At the zenith of human connections resides the profound emotion of love, a subject that has captured the attention of countless thinkers throughout history. In particular, a comparative exploration of the insights offered by Western and Eastern scholars sheds light on the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. This article centers on analyzing the contrasting perspectives on love articulated by these scholars. Indeed, the discourse surrounding love has been a longstanding theme in global literature and philosophy. Love as a problem and as a mystery is in the sphere of interests of thinkers and scientists representing different fields of knowledge. As a rule, however, the subject of research is not the feeling of love itself, which occupies a large place in a person's existence, but phenomena that are in one way or another connected with this feeling (the term “sensation” in this case is used with some convention). Love remains a subject not so much of philosophical thought as of art, as a sphere in which the objective is subordinated to the subjective and in which the conceptual apparatus characteristic of philosophy is absent as such. Meanwhile, philosophy that studies man cannot help but notice love not just as a psychological, psycho-physical phenomenon, but also as an ontological phenomenon inherent in being. In this case, love is understood as the result of the relationship between several aspects of a person's life.*

Keywords: “ishq”, love, eros, humanity, psychological analysis, creativity, human feeling, art of loving.

INTRODUCTION

Human emotions are both peculiar and enduring, evolving across generations yet retaining their essence amidst changing circumstances. Ancients proclaimed, “I am human, and I think nothing human is alien to me,” acknowledging a deep connection to feelings, desires, hidden motives, and passions. These mental processes distinguish humans from the animal kingdom, unveiling the drama of human existence through the intensity of emotions. Love, foremost among them, sustains humanity, underscoring its indispensable role in daily life. In the era of myth-making, love played an important role in the life of the family human,

generating order and harmony of the entire Cosmos, creating a world out of chaos, although was realized by primitive man at the level of figurative consciousness. The myth is being considered depicts nature and man in the form of an undivided whole, and represents the individual as a dissolved born in the primitive collective. A person directly feels his connection with the entire Cosmos, uniting with it as a single whole. Among the hierarchy of human values at that time, the main place is occupied by the idea of the continuous birth and renewal of the world. Man is a microcosm and embodies the laws of the Cosmos. The union of heaven and earth, male and female, as a result of which the continuous birth and renewal of nature took place, was a cosmic process in which man participates, but does not play a leading role. The opposition between male and female was transferred to the entire Universe (Nekrasova, Tarnovskiy, 2009: 38).

LITERATURE REVIEW

When studying the concept of “love” in space and time, a comparative, typological analysis is used [1]. The analysis methods are complemented by the synthesis method to identify commonalities both between the views of Eastern and Western philosophers, and at the level of representatives of the same type of culture in different periods of their development [2; 5]. The ideas of E. Fromm, describing changes in human values in the twentieth century, are relevant at the beginning of the twenty-first century [7; 8].

METHODOLOGY

The research employed scientific and philosophical approaches, utilizing methods such as systematic inquiry, theoretical deduction, analytical and synthetic reasoning, consideration of historical context, logical reasoning, and comparative analysis..

RESULTS

The process of human spiritual evolution is intricate and multifaceted, drawing the attention of numerous eminent thinkers across centuries. These scholars endeavored to explore the challenges and principles inherent in this developmental journey. Among them, Abu Ali ibn Sina occupies a distinctive position, with his insights into the spirit, soul, and body being particularly notable. According to ancient philosophers and sages, the soul is conceived as an exceedingly subtle essence and a lofty biological force, akin to a benevolent breath descending from the realm of divine commands. The vitality and essence of life emerge from the intricate interplay between the body and the soul a comparative study of Love: A Study of the Concept of Ishq in sufi thought and Its Interaction from Eastern and Western Perspectives [1, 13]. The surrounding milieu profoundly influences the activities of the body, encompassing not only the physical surroundings but also the individual's psyche, intellect, emotions, and the broader cosmic environment. If we view the environment as a macrocosm, then the individual functions as a microcosm within it, mutually influencing and being influenced by the surroundings. Society plays a pivotal role in fostering the individual's development, while the nurturing of one's inner being is paramount in

the pursuit of excellence. Ibn Sina regarded the body as a means or instrument for the refinement of the soul, emphasizing its pivotal role in the soul's quest for perfection. This perspective serves as a significant criterion for human maturity, as both inner and outer refinement hinge upon these factors [2, 56].

Within Islamic traditions, the concept of love permeates nearly every realm of knowledge, from the art of language to philosophy, theology, and even jurisprudence. Expressions of love abound in the works of all adherents of the Sufi tradition. Ibn Sina expounds on the stages of human love in his treatise titled "Risalai ishq," categorizing it into four distinct levels. He delineates these levels as follows: "Know that lovers are classified into four categories. Some are engaged in the pursuit of inclination and desire, others in the manifestation of will, some in the realm of affection, and the remainder in the sphere of true love" [4]. Ibn Sina provides detailed definitions for each level. According to Sufi teachings, attaining the fourth level signifies reaching the pinnacle of spiritual ascent. For those engaged in spiritual practice, failure to attain the fourth level impedes their spiritual elevation. Here, we shall elucidate the significance of each rank so that practitioners, known as *tax collectors*, may discern their respective standings. The first level entails the practitioner sitting in seclusion, reciting *zikr* (remembrance of God) aloud.

Continuing from the previous passage, the progression through these ranks is significant in understanding the evolution of love within the Sufi tradition. In the first rank, the practitioner is characterized by engagement in worldly affairs, yet maintains a continuous recitation of *zikr* (remembrance of God) in their native language, albeit with less efficacy. Despite its diminished effect, this practice still holds benefits. Moving to the second rank, the *zakhir* (practitioner) transitions to a state where *zikr* dominates their inner world, while their external language becomes subdued. This stage is marked by diligent effort to achieve such inward focus, a milestone sought after by most practitioners despite its challenging nature.

The third rank represents a deeper immersion in *zikr*, where it not only fills the inner being but also permeates the heart, becoming inseparable from one's essence. In this state, the practitioner finds it difficult to engage in external tasks without being consumed by *zikr*, akin to struggling to divert attention from their beloved. The practitioner in this rank experiences an intimate connection with the object of their affection, constantly yearning for their presence and seeking opportunities to praise or hear praises of their beloved. Even if compelled to attend to external matters, their thoughts invariably return to their beloved, underscoring the intensity of their love.

Finally, in the fourth and most revered rank, the essence of *zikr* transcends speech and settles deeply within the heart. Here, the practitioner achieves a profound union with the beloved, where thoughts of anything else fade into insignificance. This ultimate stage of love is characterized by an overwhelming preoccupation with the beloved, to the extent that their very name becomes

synonymous with remembrance. In this state, the practitioner's entire existence revolves around their beloved, and nothing else holds significance.

This progression illustrates the evolution of love from its nascent stages of inclination and desire to its ultimate manifestation as a consuming passion. Each rank represents a distinct phase in the journey toward spiritual union, marked by increasing intensity and intimacy with the object of love.

O dervish, anyone wishing to engage in conversation initially harbors a simple desire to communicate. As this desire intensifies and takes root within, it transforms into a determined will. With further nurturing, this will evolves into love. Eventually, when this love reaches its peak, it transcends into a profound and all-encompassing affection. Thus, love represents an elevated form of emotion, surpassing both the initial desire and the subsequent willpower.

The passage underscores the variety and complexity of relationships, aiming to differentiate between genuine love and superficial affection. Initially, the author defines love as a universal phenomenon present in all living beings. However, Ibn Sina goes further to explore the philosophical distinctions between human love and other forms. Before directly addressing this topic, he seeks to establish the benefits of internal harmony within individuals. According to his perspective, every force exerts an influence in life; for instance, nurturing a tree can lead to its growth and beauty, attracting attention. Unlike animals, humans possess intellect and the ability to communicate, enabling them to influence others through speech. Consequently, individuals strive toward specific goals, tirelessly pursuing success, seeking innovation, and implementing change.

Ibn Sina critiques those who superficially base their affection on a person's external appearance, advocating for a broader understanding of beauty. He posits that true beauty extends beyond mere physical attractiveness, encompassing qualities such as good manners, character, and intelligence. According to Ibn Sina, even if an individual lacks conventional beauty, possessing these inner virtues renders them the epitome of beauty. This perspective resonates with the views of Russian writer A.P. Chekhov and other philosophers to some extent. Ibn Sina asserts that genuine love transcends envy and superficiality; instead, it is rooted in intelligence and insight, acknowledging the deeper essence of a person. Such love, he contends, signifies a high level of humanity, symbolizing bravery, wisdom, and refined taste [5, 86].

Ibn Sina draws a clear distinction between the primal instinct of lust found in animals and the conscious, elevated form of love unique to humans. He asserts that for genuine love to flourish, individuals must possess knowledge, intellectual acumen, and act with wisdom and insight—qualities that animals lack. According to Ibn Sina, if individuals employ wisdom in their actions, their love will endure; however, if they succumb to base desires akin to animalistic lust, their love will deteriorate. Even when individuals possess both wisdom and desire, Ibn Sina emphasizes the importance of prioritizing intellect and entrepreneurship over

animalistic tendencies. Only by doing so can individuals attain true humanity and live a fulfilling life [7, 86].

In conclusion, "Risalai ishq" stands as a socio-ethical work of significant importance, representing a unique philosophical contribution in the history of Eastern thought. Ibn Sina's work not only offers moral insights but also serves as a valuable philosophical source. The advanced ideas presented in "Risalai ishq" mark a pivotal stage in the development of Eastern philosophy during the Middle Ages. Therefore, studying, translating, and analyzing this work is crucial for understanding and preserving the heritage and values passed down by our ancestors—a foundation upon which contemporary society can build.

Drawing from the research conducted by scholar Khodjayeva Fatima [6], the central theme of the philosophical outlook of another Eastern thinker, Ahmad Ghazali, revolves around the concept of love for God. Ghazali posits that the soul emanates from the realm of humanity, encountering love on the precipice of existence. Initially unaware of its destined receptacle, love accompanies the soul as an inherent quality, ultimately settling within it upon finding an empty space. Debates abound regarding whether love possesses a preference or bias, yet Ghazali maintains that true love transcends such limitations, existing in a state of impartiality. Authentic love, he asserts, does not require allegiance to any particular side or faction.

However, Ghazali presents a nuanced perspective, employing metaphorical anecdotes to illustrate his point. He references the tale of someone allegedly stealing the Sultan's catch without causing harm, suggesting a deeper moral lesson. Similarly, he analogizes the relationship between a master artisan and their apprentice, highlighting the role of guidance and nurturing in the development of expertise. Ghazali further elucidates through the example of the chameleon, which effortlessly assimilates the color of its surroundings without standing out—a metaphor for the fluid and adaptable nature of genuine love.

According to the thinker, when an individual finds their heart liberated from external influences, and the window of the heart is clear, a distinct image emerges and becomes firmly established within the soul. Witnessing oneself, the name, or the attributes of the beloved illuminated within the soul signifies the pinnacle of perfection. This state transcends the constraints of time; time itself becomes obscured in their perception, overshadowed by the deluge of inner contemplation. The individual merges with this state, assuming its essence and perceiving it in their place [6, 56].

Ahmad Ghazali suggests that at times, the soul serves as the fertile ground for love, from which the tree of love blossoms. Occasionally, the soul assumes the role of the Divine and bestows attributes upon itself. In some instances, spirit and love, akin to two partners in the same room, emerge sequentially from the doorway. Moreover, if love represents the essence, then the soul becomes an attribute of it, and the nature of the soul is contingent upon love. However, such profound truths may elude human understanding. Ultimately, these insights are only realized after

the annihilation of all human qualities. Those who attain this level of understanding do not deem the state preceding the eradication of human qualities as correct.

Thinker suggests that love assumes various roles, often symbolized by natural elements and phenomena. At times, love resembles the expansive sky while the soul embodies the nurturing earth, with rain falling as needed by the moment. Alternatively, love can be likened to a seed, finding its home within the soul and sprouting forth whatever it contains. In another analogy, love is compared to a precious gem within a mine, where the soul serves as the vessel, embodying the qualities of the gem. Love may also be envisioned as the radiant sun illuminating the soul's sky, with the soul basking in its warmth. Conversely, love may resemble a shooting star in the soul's atmosphere, igniting and consuming it. It can manifest as a decorated saddle guiding the spirit forward, or as reins directing the soul's whims. At times, love acts as the binding chain of an ardent lover, restraining the soul, while at others, it resembles the poisoned wine inflicting painful torment and leading to its demise.

According to the German orientalist H. Ritter, mystical love stands apart from worldly affection by encompassing a transcendent, absolute object within the realm of love. This elevated nature of love enhances its value, leading to a demand for superiority and ultimately granting it absolute dominion over all other emotional inclinations. Consequently, this process results in the deepening, diversification, and refinement of the soul's romantic life, transforming love into a genuine art form. Those engaged in this pursuit are adept at navigating and expressing the full spectrum of emotional experiences and romantic sentiments [6, 57].

Ahmad Ghazali acknowledges that a soul devoid of love is empty and can only find fulfillment through love. From his perspective, every aspect of human existence serves a purpose, and it becomes evident that the soul's essence lies in love and infatuation rather than any other pursuit. In essence, one of the central tenets of Ahmad Ghazali's philosophy revolves around the soul, depicted as the ruler governing the human city. He contends that preserving monotheism is solely the responsibility of the soul, with love playing a pivotal role. According to Ghazali, who attributes the heart's function to love, a soul devoid of love remains in a state of void, finding fulfillment only through love. Furthermore, Ghazali equates monotheism with love, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these concepts. Additionally, he explores the levels and ascent of the soul, acknowledging the existence of both soul and spirit, and deeming mystery as a fundamental aspect of the soul's journey.

Love originates from sensuality, serving as a foundation for sexuality, yet it transcends mere physical gratification. It encompasses the union of souls and encourages introspection within the individual. This complexity led ancient Greeks to delineate various forms of love, with Eros representing the deification of lust or reckless passion. Love, however, entails more than just fleeting desires; it is a profound passion devoid of fatal consequences. In essence, human subjectivity is

conceived as the interplay between reason, passion, and will. What defines love itself? How does it differ from mere desire or adoration? Eros, symbolizing lust, remains enigmatic-perhaps the greatest, inexhaustible passion embodying the yearning for eternal connection. In ancient cosmogonies, Eros was revered as the primal force propelling the creation of the universe. Man, an embodiment of the life-giving forces of nature, was integral to these mystical beliefs from the dawn of time, expressed through diverse forms of worship-sometimes austere, sometimes fervent and orgiastic.

How does an individual perceive love? Do they regard their body with reverence, considering it a sacred vessel or perhaps a conduit for base desires? Do they recognize the universality of desire or only its singular aspect? In Greek philosophy and art, the human nature, image, and body are unequivocally portrayed as symbols of perfection and harmony. Greek art, viewed as an epitome of sophistication, vividly conveys this perspective.

According to Alexey Gastev, "Ancient Greek art is an emotional art, rooted in the observation and analysis of the world derived from experience. It eschews fanciful imagery and symbolism, instead embodying tangible value; statues existed not merely as representations of gods but as embodiments of divinity themselves." Ancient philosophers similarly expounded on the nature of the human soul, contemplating the intrinsic value of humanity and the purpose behind its attributes. Love, in their view, was considered a profound emotion bestowed by the gods. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, presided over lovers, bestowing divine blessings upon the union of bodies and the spiritual allure inherent in the joy of life.

In the ancient Greek mindset, a distinction between physical and spiritual love began to emerge gradually. Emotional inclinations reflected an appreciation for the beauty of the human form, leading to increasingly personalized poetic experiences. Plato advocated for the necessity of tempering the pursuit of happiness to a certain extent, while Aristotle held the belief that indulging in bodily pleasures was inherently positive.

In both artistic and scientific discourse, numerous efforts have been made to elucidate the diverse manifestations of love, encompassing its multifaceted nature. Mundane love manifests in myriad forms. French writer Stendhal observed the multitude of facets inherent in desire, even attempting to categorize four distinct types of love. In his classification, the first type is characterized by passion. For instance, he highlights the tragic tale of 18th-century French philosopher Pierre Abelard and Eloise, where their love ultimately concludes with Eloise's retreat to the temple.

Another category of love identified by Stendhal is affection, which he discerned through the literature and writings of the 18th century. His examination particularly delved into physical love. Love, as a sentiment universally experienced, is often exemplified by the anticipation of encounters with young and beautiful peasant women retreating to the forest, notes the writer. This constitutes

the third type of love. Lastly, Stendhal identifies ambitious love as another variant of this emotion.

Various approaches exist regarding the typology of love as a profound sentiment. For instance, brotherly love, as proposed by Erich Fromm, serves as the foundational type underlying all other forms of love. Brotherly love encompasses a sense of duty, nurturing care, respect, and the inclination to understand and aid another person. This form of love is encapsulated in the biblical injunction: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Brotherly love extends to all individuals, characterized by its lack of exclusivity as its defining trait.

The foundation of brotherly love begins with affection for the vulnerable, the impoverished, and the stranger. Loving one's child and providing for their well-being is considered a significant accomplishment. Similarly, animals exhibit love and care towards their offspring. Individuals may also develop affection towards their masters out of dependency or towards their parents out of necessity. However, genuine brotherly love extends to those without ulterior motives.

Another type of love outlined by Fromm is maternal love, which inherently encompasses an unspoken commitment to nurturing and meeting the child's needs. Yet, there are two facets to affirming a child's existence. One aspect involves providing care and assuming responsibility, while the other fosters a sense of joy in life, imbuing the child with the belief that life is inherently good. These dual aspects find parallels in the biblical narrative of creation. While God's act of creating the world and humanity demonstrates basic concern and provision, God surpasses this minimum by affirming the goodness of creation at the conclusion of each day.

In contemporary culture, love is often perceived as an escalation of emotions, a scenario where an individual is suddenly engulfed by an irresistible feeling. This perspective does not regard every man as a part of Adam and every woman as a part of Eve; rather, it emphasizes the unique characteristics of these two individuals. Erotic love, according to this view, necessitates an exceptional, distinctive personality that emerges not universally between all individuals but specifically between certain people.

Another form of love worthy of consideration is self-love. While the concept of love can be applied to various entities, and while loving others is often regarded as virtuous, there's a prevalent belief that self-love is sinful. The more an individual loves themselves and the less they love others, the more self-love is equated with selfishness. This perspective is deeply ingrained in Western thought, with Kelvin, in particular, likening self-love to a "plague." Consequently, love and selfishness are viewed as mutually exclusive concepts, with one being perceived as stronger and the other weaker. However, is the notion of a fundamental opposition between self-love and love for others supported by psychological observations? A person's ability to nurture their personal growth, happiness, and freedom is predicated on their capacity for love — encompassing care, respect, responsibility, and understanding. If an individual is capable of genuine love, they inherently love

themselves. Conversely, if they are only capable of loving others, their love is incomplete.

CONCLUSION

Hence, love represents a profound affection for all living beings nestled within the human heart. Through the lens of the heart, individuals perceive the spiritual beauty veiled within every entity. These insights, discerned through the heart's vision, transcend what is observable by the naked eye. The splendor of the universe, in essence, reflects the divine beauty concealed within all creations. Consequently, genuine faith in God equates to love for God, as it is through this love that the inherent creative potential within individuals is unveiled. While individuals may harbor love for many things and engage in various pursuits throughout their lives, there exists a limit to these endeavors.

Despite the shared emphasis on love among Sufi scholars, Ahmad Ghazali's perspective on love distinguishes itself with unique characteristics. Unlike his predecessors, Ghazali's conception of love transcends the conventional notions of human love for God or vice versa. Instead, he introduces the notion of "absolute love," where the "lover" could be either a human, God, or even the devil. These distinctive features and profound insights set Ghazali's school of love apart from preceding Sufi traditions and contemporary Sufi teachings.

The examination of Ibn Sina, Ahmad Ghazali, and Erich Fromm's perspectives on love intersects with a broad array of psychological, spiritual, and sociological ideologies. Their interpretations of love are centered on uncovering the inherent humanity within individuals, with the collective sentiment aimed at enriching personal growth.

Erich Fromm delineates love across various dimensions: cognitively, it entails grasping the unique inner world of the individual; behaviorally, it manifests as creativity and self-expression; emotionally, it encompasses a sense of unity with others, nature, and humanity as a whole. Love, according to these thinkers, serves as an active force within individuals, breaking down barriers that separate them and fostering closer connections. It represents the most universal form of self-expression, epitomizing the interconnectedness of the entire world.

Individuals immersed in love are characterized by their zest for life, cheerfulness, and unwavering capacity for wonder. Their internal psychological disposition remains overwhelmingly positive, enabling them to navigate through adversity with resilience. During societal crises, such individuals serve as beacons of encouragement, bolstering morale within the community. Fromm identifies them as the driving force behind societal progress and development.

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