

Pilgrimage Metaphor in Persian Mystical Poetry

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OBJECTIVES:

- This study critically explores the metaphorical use of “pilgrimage” (*zīārat*) in Persian mystical poetry, particularly in the works of Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī, Maḥmūd Shabistarī, and Ṣā’ib Tabrīzī.
- It examines the mystical underpinnings of “pilgrimage” in the poets’ works, analyzing its metaphorical usage and critiquing the potential limitations of this metaphorical interpretation.



THESIS:

- The poets transcend the term's traditional religious implications, imbuing it with a profound spiritual and philosophical resonance.
- Pilgrimage is a spiritual journey surpassing literal religious adherence.
- The heart: an object of pilgrimage, reflecting humans' inherent sacredness and divinity.
- This interpretation expands the notion of pilgrimage beyond a physical journey to a metaphorical quest for self-understanding, compassion, self-transcendence, and divine unity.
- The metaphorical interpretation of “pilgrimage” extends beyond the confines of literature and has socio-cultural implications in Muslim societies like Iran.



Ḥajj

Ḥajj: synthesis of “external” rituals and “internal” spiritual transformation.

- The actions of the *Ḥajj* embody the “ritualistic aspects” of the pilgrimage.
 - e.g., circumambulation, animal sacrifice, and drinking water from the sanctified Zamzam well.
- Pilgrimage also constitutes a “spiritual transformation.”
 - Sacrifice and annihilation (*fanā*) of the self.
- The climax: communion with the divine—an awareness of the divine presence, leading to divine union.
- “Sacrifice” in pilgrimage:
 - Abraham’s readiness to offer his son, Ishmael, is ultimate surrender to God.
- Thus, the true essence of a pilgrimage is balancing its tangible rituals and spiritual transformations.



Pilgrimage in
Persian Mystical Poetry

Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī
Quest for the Divine Love-Knowledge



- Ḥāfeẓ associates “pilgrimage” with “tavern” (*meykade*) and “wine house” (*meykhāne*).

ثوابِ روزه و حج قبول آن کس برد که خاک میکده عشق را زیارت کرد
The reward for fasting and accepted pilgrimage is his,
Who has made a pilgrimage to the dust of the tavern of love.
(Ḥāfeẓ, *Dīwān*, Ghazal 131)

- Wine: love and knowledge, indicating the spiritual transformation that can be achieved through the Ḥajj rites.
- “Tavern of love”: “state of spiritual intoxication,” a destination unveiling the true essence of the “rituals of piety” through divine love.
- Pilgrimage: figuratively signifies a “spiritual journey” of transformation and enlightenment.

- Pilgrimage: visiting the “wine house.”

بآب روشن می عارفی طهارت کرد علی الصباح که میخانه را زیارت کرد
In the luminous water of wine, the gnostic his purity asserts,
At the break of dawn, his pilgrimage to the wine house diverts.
(Ḥāfeẓ, *Dīwān*, Ghazal 106)

- This pilgrimage signifies a spiritual journey of “purification” and “intoxicating enlightenment.”
- This verse highlights the transformative nature of the spiritual pilgrimage.



SYMBOLISM IN PERSIAN POETRY

- Symbolism in Sufi poetry: navigating and criticizing socio-cultural realities of mystics' era.
- Ḥāfeẓ does not criticize religion per se; he criticizes the rigid interpretations of religious scholars of his time.
- Additionally, symbolic language was a shield, allowing Ḥāfeẓ to traverse the spiritual discourse's treacherous landscape safely.
- Symbolic and metaphoric language's potential limitations:
 - The poetic representation of pilgrimage may risk undermining the physical pilgrimage's role in the tradition.
 - The heavy reliance on the wine metaphor could alienate those unable to connect with this symbol due to cultural, religious, or personal constraints.



Shabistarī and Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī
Quest for the Divine Shrine: Heart

THE ROOTS OF “HEART AS A SHRINE”:

- Quran, e.g., verse (38:72), wherein God says He has imparted His spirit into humans.
- Prophetic *ḥadīth*, where God proclaims: “Neither the Heavens nor the Earth can contain Me, but the heart of My believing servant can contain Me.”



A man with a long white beard, wearing a brown robe and a white turban, is seated in a wooden chair. He is looking towards the right. The room is dimly lit, with a single lantern hanging from the ceiling. The walls and ceiling are adorned with intricate Islamic geometric patterns. A large vase filled with red roses sits on the floor next to the chair. The floor is made of dark wood.

Inner pilgrimage to the heart in Persian poetry:

Shabistarī's *Marātib al-ʿĀrifīn*:
The human heart: an object of pilgrimage.

در راه خدا دو کعبه آمد حاصل یک کعبه صورت است و یک کعبه دل
تا بتوانی زیارت دلها کن کافزون ز هزار کعبه آمد یک دل

Upon the sacred path, two Ka'bas found,
One of earthly form, one of heart's profound.

Visit hearts while strength in thee remains,
For one heart's worth a thousand Ka'bas gains.
(Shabistarī 1993, 399)

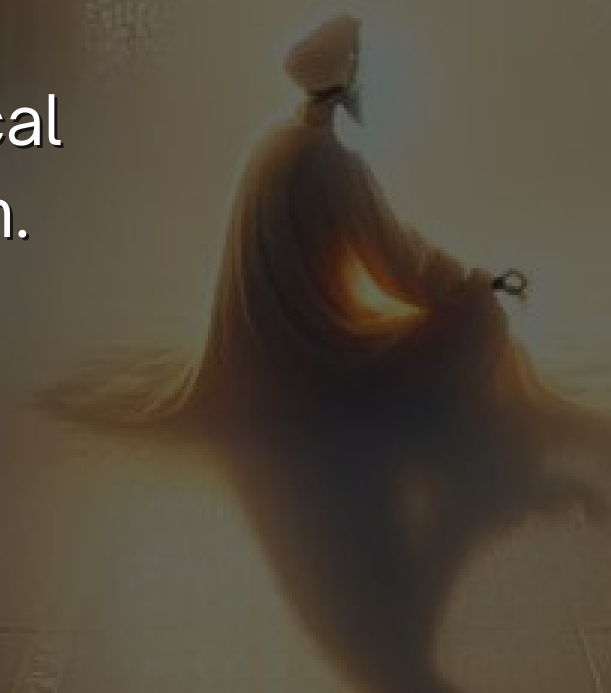
- Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī's (2023) ghazal 6336:

چه گل در آب به تعمیر کعبه می گیری؟ خراب گشته دلی را برو عمارت کن

Why mix clay with water for the Ka'bah's repair?

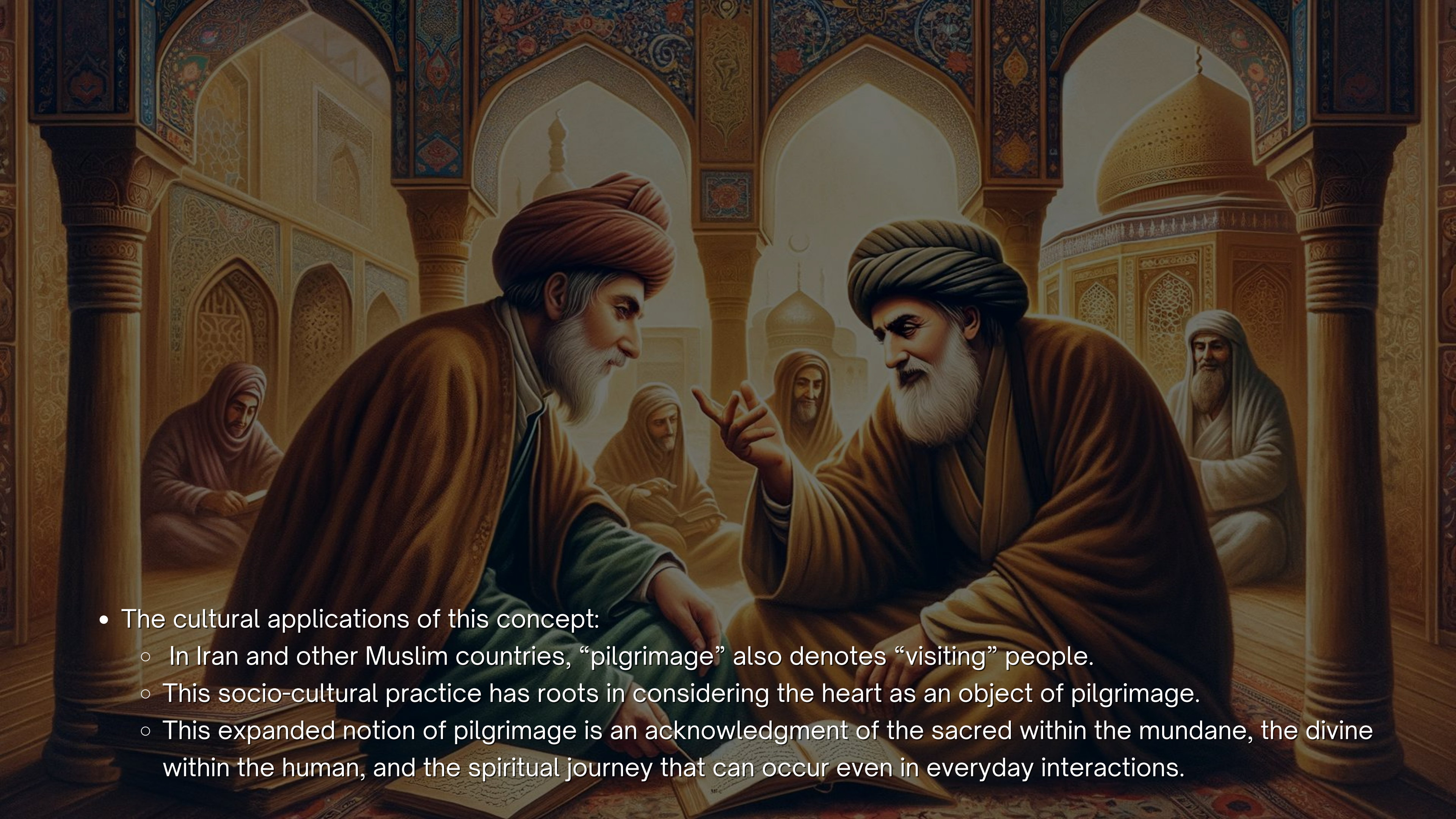
Go, mend a heart that's shattered, lay your craft there.

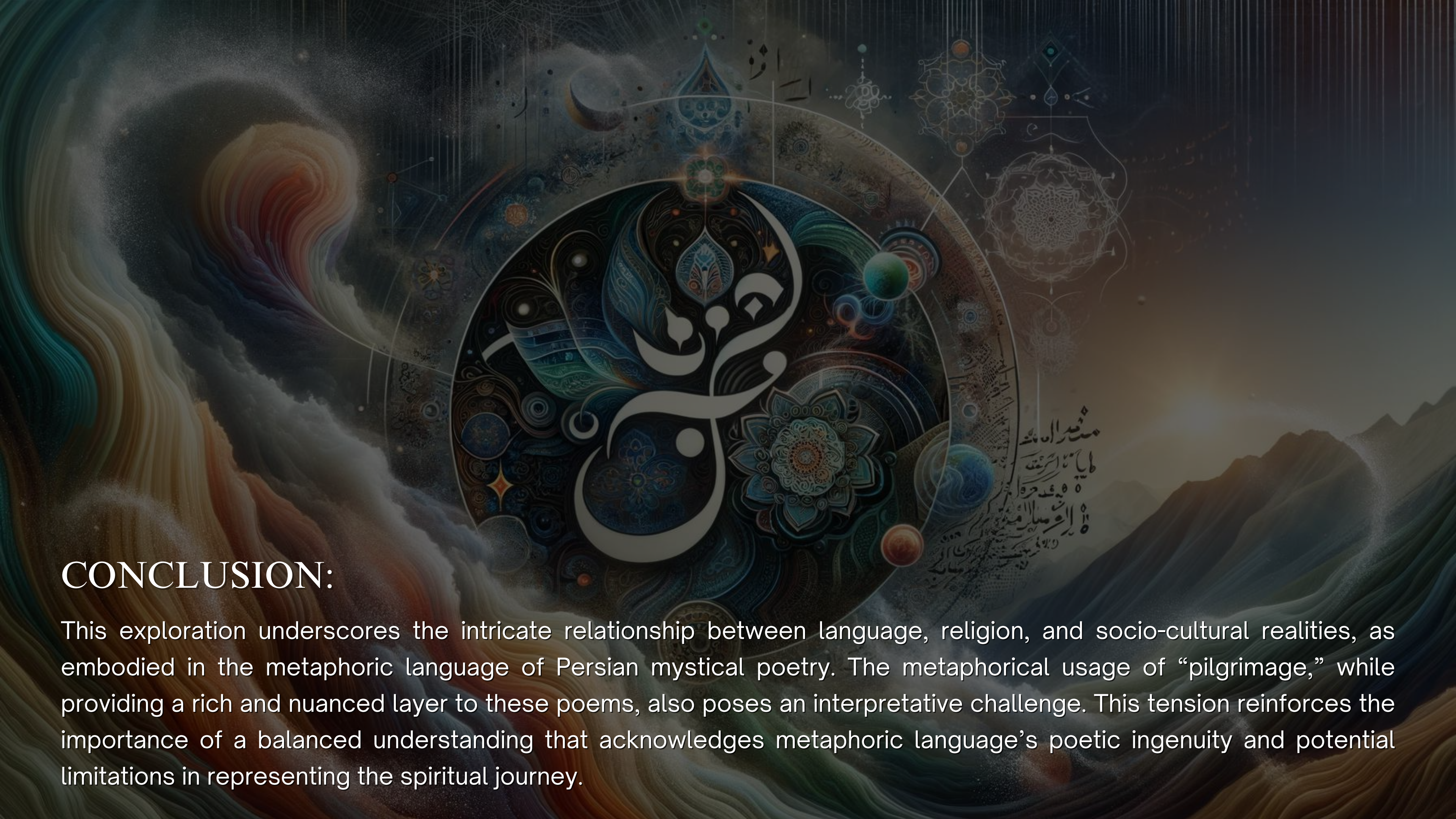
- Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī questions the emphasis on adorning the Ka'ba while neglecting the healing of broken hearts, introducing true pilgrimage as a metaphorical journey focused on alleviating the suffering of the needy, promoting compassion and empathy.
- This interpretation may not resonate with all who value physical pilgrimage, seeing it as a concrete manifestation of their devotion.





- Shabistarī and Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī's considering the heart as an object of pilgrimage also resonates with the Islamic mystical interpretation of *Hajj*.
 - Circumambulating the Ka'ba mirrors a cosmic dance with celestial beings, leading to a mystical union with the divine.
 - Circumambulating the heart is also a path to divine union.

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- The cultural applications of this concept:
 - In Iran and other Muslim countries, “pilgrimage” also denotes “visiting” people.
 - This socio-cultural practice has roots in considering the heart as an object of pilgrimage.
 - This expanded notion of pilgrimage is an acknowledgment of the sacred within the mundane, the divine within the human, and the spiritual journey that can occur even in everyday interactions.



CONCLUSION:

This exploration underscores the intricate relationship between language, religion, and socio-cultural realities, as embodied in the metaphoric language of Persian mystical poetry. The metaphorical usage of “pilgrimage,” while providing a rich and nuanced layer to these poems, also poses an interpretative challenge. This tension reinforces the importance of a balanced understanding that acknowledges metaphoric language’s poetic ingenuity and potential limitations in representing the spiritual journey.