

# **The Reflection of the Qur'an's Educational Concepts and Themes in Contemporary Iranian Plays (Case Study: The Plays Parizad of the City of the Forgotten and Four Chests)<sup>۱</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The Qur'an, an educational book with multilayered narratives, has strongly influenced dramatic arts in Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. However, most contemporary Qur'anic plays focus narrowly on specific subjects, thereby diverging from comprehensive Qur'anic themes. This narrow focus has confined the works to repetitive and stereotypical surface-level topics. In the present study, the two plays Parizad of the City of the Forgotten and Four Chests are selected to identify, extract, and analyze the components of Qur'anic plays and the reflection

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of Qur'anic themes in dramatic works, aiming to provide a comprehensive definition of Qur'anic drama. The main research question is: 'What characteristics cause contemporary plays to be classified as Qur'anic artistic works?' The research method is descriptive–analytical. By rigorously examining the selected plays' content for Qur'anic components, this study establishes that the authenticity of Qur'anic narratives lies in their thematic substance, which, when preserved, can be successfully adapted into various contemporary dramatic forms with diverse subjects and modes of expression. Therefore, it can be asserted that there is no essential functional or message-based distinction between religious and non-religious plays, highlighting the universal adaptability and relevance of Qur'anic themes within modern dramaturgy.

**Keywords:** Qur'anic Drama, Contemporary Plays, Educational Concepts and Themes, Parizad of the City of the Forgotten, Four Chests.

## **Introduction**

One branch of Islamic art in the contemporary era is dramatic art, which can be defined within the framework of Islamic art. Play-writers have used this medium to better understand and represent Islamic culture (Afshari, ۲۰۱۲ AD/۱۳۹۱ SH: ۱۷–۱۸). The Holy Qur'an is a book rich in ethical, educational, and wisdom-based teachings, with valuable and profound content. All of its narratives and discussions contain multiple layers of meaning that guide humanity along the path of life. A significant portion of this divine book consists of narratives, accounts of past nations, stories of prophets, parables, and ethical teachings.

The form of Qur'anic narratives includes elements such as character, plot, theme, dialogue, time, and place, elements that are also fundamental components of drama (Joulaei & Nordaryaei, ۲۰۱۹ AD/۱۳۹۸ SH: ۳۳). Thus, through its dramatic mode of

expression, God educates humanity and teaches the manner of living. One of the most important purposes of drama is to create inner transformation in human beings (Sarsangi & Parsaei, ۲۰۱۰ AD/۱۳۸۹ SH: ۳۸), a feature clearly evident in the Qur'an's dramatic dimension. Accordingly, many Qur'anic teachings are expressed in a dramatic form, and since drama is a socially influential art, it can play a key role in meeting the cultural and artistic needs of Islamic society.

Attention to Qur'anic concepts and teachings in dramatic arts has been of special importance since the early days of the Islamic Republic. However, a critical examination of the content and features of contemporary Qur'anic plays reveals that an unintended restriction gradually emerged, focusing predominantly on a limited set of Qur'anic topics. Consequently, the proposed theoretical criteria drifted away from comprehensive and essential characteristics, including a wide range of Qur'anic themes. This issue has emerged in recent debates in religious playwriting and theater, evident in press conferences and scholarly articles by playwrights and directors (Hamidi Parsa & Heidari Khalili, ۲۰۲۲ AD/۱۴۰۱ SH: ۱۵۱–۳۹۷). The main problem is the lack of a clear definition of Qur'anic art based on its conceptual roots. Because of this, contemporary plays in this field face the same issue. Thus, it is essential to establish a comprehensive definition of Qur'anic art and its evaluation criteria. This article analyzes produced plays to identify specialized criteria for Qur'anic drama. It argues that using Qur'anic data as evaluative standards is essential for artistic works, moving Qur'anic dramatic arts beyond adaptation and retelling to address all Qur'anic themes. The research aims to measure how various plays reflect Qur'anic themes and proposes a new, less restrictive definition of Qur'anic drama of this research is to identify the capacity of various Qur'anic themes for dramatic representation within the category of Qur'anic artistic works, as well as to extract and analyze the components of contemporary Qur'anic plays and to clarify

how Qur'anic concepts and themes are reflected in them. The research questions are as follows:

- What characteristics make contemporary plays qualify as Qur'anic artistic works?
- What components define contemporary Qur'anic plays?
- How are Qur'anic themes presented in plays?

Accordingly, this research selects one religious and one non-religious play from diverse contemporary works that address Qur'anic themes and incorporate educational concepts. The scope of analysis is limited to these two plays. Through thematic comparison, the reflection of the designated criteria is analyzed and identified.

## **١. Research Background**

This section first introduces the origins and background of the selected plays and then reviews and critiques the most important relevant academic sources.

### **A) Parizad of the City of the Forgotten**

Parizad of the City of the Forgotten is a play by contemporary playwright Lida Tarzi, written in ٢٠١٨ AD/١٤٩٧ SH. The play is written in two acts. The first act bears the main title (Parizad of the City of the Forgotten), while the second is titled "The Tale of Asmar the Magician and That Idol Who Was Not Parizad." The central theme of the play is rooted in the substance of ancient mystical and Islamic spiritual tales, in which philosophical and mystical themes are clearly evident within a religious framework.

The play narrates the story of the inhabitants of a city who have forgotten both themselves and their God. As a result, the blessing of childbearing has been taken from them. The people seek a wise man to resolve this problem, and he demands collective repentance to God and a spiritual retreat (forty days of seclusion) in a cave

for a young couple. The play's theme concerns the true self of human beings, the practice of self-discipline, and the constant remembrance of God.

The play covers many religious ideas. These include divine punishment, forgetting God, God's acceptance of repentance, trusting in God's mercy, being thankful, believing in the power of prayer, and the severe punishment for leaders who sin and lead others astray.

### **B) Four Chests**

Four Chests is the eleventh play by Bahram Beyzaie, written in ۱۹۶۷ AD/۱۳۴۶ SH. With its social theme, it is considered one of Beyzaie's most suitable works in terms of social content during the ۱۹۶۰s. In this work, the playwright presents his critical understanding of contemporary social events through a committed artistic form that guides the audience and serves as a social critique, raising collective awareness.

This short play offers a mimetic representation of Iranian society in the ۱۹۶۰s. Beyzaie introduces four characters, Yellow, Green, Red, and Black, along with a Scarecrow. Each color represents a specific social class or group. These four characters symbolize the multi-identity nature of Iranian society, the diversity of its people, and the lack of harmony and compatibility among them. This multiplicity leads to division and discord, opportunism, helplessness and confusion, negligence, exploitation of the body, the soul, and thought, and ultimately the formation of hypocritical and false personalities. Such a condition may also be rooted in cultural, social, political, and ideological foundations.

Ali Hossein Farrokhi (۲۰۱۳ AD/۱۳۹۲ SH), in his doctoral dissertation titled "An Analytical Study of the Dramatic Aspects of Qur'anic Stories," examines the elements of playwriting in order to confirm or refute their presence in Qur'anic narratives through textual analysis.

Ali Asghar Gholamreza (۲۰۱۰ AD/۱۳۸۹ SH), in his dissertation titled "An Analysis of the Visual Narrative Structure of Qur'anic Stories with Emphasis on the Story of Surah *al-Kahf*," explains a theoretical model for the visual narrative structure of Qur'anic stories and argues that the Qur'an has established a unique narrative structure in storytelling.

Reza Abbasi (۲۰۱۶ AD/۱۳۹۵ SH), in his MA thesis titled "An Analysis of the Process of Dramatic Adaptation of Qur'anic Narratives from the Perspective of Narratology," analyzes and compares the structure of Qur'anic stories using narratological theory, arguing that beneath the dramatic surface of Surah *al-Kahf* lies a shared semantic coherence among its events.

Ahmad Joulaei and Ahmad Nourdaryaei (۲۰۱۹ AD/۱۳۹۸ SH), in their article "The Dramatic Capacities of Qur'anic Narratives," examine the Qur'an's dramatic potential, arguing that, as revealed through its educational content for human guidance and its narratives and prophetic stories, it inherently possesses dramatic dimensions.

Morteza Afshari (۲۰۱۰ AD/۱۳۸۹ SH), in "The Status of Drama as an Educational Method in the Holy Qur'an," examines the role of dramatic arts such as television, cinema, and theater as educational tools.

Majid Sarsangi and Mansour Parsaei (۲۰۱۰ AD/۱۳۸۹ SH), in "Religious Drama: A Study on the Necessity of Modernizing Form and Hermeneutic Critique of Content," emphasize the need to reconsider and critically revise both form and content in contemporary religious theater.

The difference between the present article and previous studies lies not only in its method, theoretical framework, and case studies, but also in a fundamental theoretical claim; none of the previous dissertations, theses, or articles has addressed the elimination of the distinction between religious and non-religious plays from this perspective. In contrast, the present study is based on the theory that any play

containing Qur'anic concepts and themes can be classified as a Qur'anic play, even without direct reference to explicit Qur'anic subjects.

## **۲. Research Method**

In terms of purpose, this study is fundamental, and in terms of method, it follows a descriptive–analytical approach using a comparative study and a theoretical framework of qualitative content analysis. Data were collected through library and documentary research. In addition to reviewing previous foundational studies related to the present research's thematic focus, the required materials were extracted through note-taking. In this study, the data analysis method is qualitative.

The research population consists of prominent contemporary Iranian plays, from which two plays- The Religious Play "Parizad of the Forgotten City" and The Play "Four Chests"- were selected through non-probability (purposive) sampling, as they contain concepts related to Quranic components within the theoretical framework of the study.

## **۳. Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of textual data through systematic processes of classification, coding, and theme and pattern identification (Mo'menirad et al., ۲۰۱۳ AD/۱۳۹۲ SH: ۱۹۴). Content analysis should contribute to the conceptualization of that part of reality reflected in the analyzed text (Krippendorff, ۲۰۱۱ AD/۱۳۹۰ SH: ۲۸).

Since the defining feature of both the Holy Qur'an and plays is their textual nature, they convey explicit and implicit messages that can be identified through various methods. One of these methods is qualitative content analysis. Based on the above definitions, this study employs thematic content analysis to examine the messages of Quranic verses and plays.

Ma'rufi and Yousefzadeh (۲۰۰۹ AD/۱۳۸۸ SH: ۱۳۶) define theme as follows:

"Themes are the most valuable units to be considered in content analysis. By themes is meant the specific meaning inferred from a word, sentence, or paragraph. These themes do not occupy a fixed and limited space, because a single sentence may have several themes, and several paragraphs may contain only one theme."

In this method, the themes of Quranic verses and plays are coded and categorized, and, after identifying the unit of meaning and the unit of analysis for each major educational and moral theme, each set is classified separately.

In this article, the themes of Quranic verses are first categorized based on their Persian translations and interpretations, and then analyzed. Therefore, this research uses thematic content analysis to examine, analyze, and compare the texts of the Holy Qur'an and the selected plays in terms of educational and moral concepts and themes.

## **۴. Theoretical Foundations of the Research**

This section presents definitions and explanations of the theoretical concepts relevant to the article subject to support the discussion and analysis of the findings.

### **۴.۱. Quranic Topics**

If Quranic teachings are presented in the form of propositions, they constitute the theme of a work; if they are included as a general concept in the form of a single word, they form the *topic* of the work (Hamidi-Parsa & Heydari-Khalili, ۲۰۲۲ AD/۱۴۰۱ SH: ۱۵۶). Quranic teachings are rich and reliable sources that have emerged as authentic and enlightening ideas. The term *teaching* encompasses both Quranic concepts and topics, since concepts refer only to specific words and

expressions, while their discussion leads to the explanation and expansion of Quranic topics.

Titles such as: "Love, wrath, knowledge, innate nature, oppression, desire, soul, heart," and similar terms fall into this category (Hamidi Parsa & Heydari Khalili, ۲۰۲۲ AD/۱۴۰۱ SH: ۱۵۶).

The main subject of the Qur'an is human guidance, and the Qur'an seeks to introduce human beings to themselves. According to the verse "Guidance for mankind," (al-Baqarah: ۱۸۵) the Qur'an is meant to guide all humanity. Therefore, the domain of Quranic topics is the guidance and purification of humankind (Yazdi, ۲۰۱۷ AD/۱۳۹۶ SH: ۱۲).

Among these topics are:

"Knowledge of God, knowledge of resurrection and the afterlife, angels and the intermediaries of divine grace, prophets and perfect human beings, sincerity and degrees of faith, creation of the heavens and the earth, call to the worship of God, reminder of divine blessings, history and fate of past nations, piety and self-purification, moral virtues, religious laws and commandments, description of human groups (believers, disbelievers, and hypocrites), attributes of angels, glorification and praise by all beings, worldly affairs and divine laws governing existence, the transitory nature of worldly life, miracles and confirmation of previous heavenly scriptures and correction of their distortions." (Motahhari, ۲۰۱۷ AD/۱۳۹۶ SH: ۸)

The present study assumes that Quranic teachings are expressed across multiple thematic dimensions and therefore classifies Quranic topics within the broader category of the Qur'an's educational themes.

## **۴،۲. Quranic Themes**

A theme is the core essence, central idea, and dominant thought in any work, the thread that runs through it and connects its events and situations. In other words, it is the governing idea that the author applies in the narrative. The theme coordinates the subject with the characters and reflects the author's intellectual and perceptual direction (Mirsadeghi, ٢٠٠١ AD/١٣٨٠ SH: ٤٢).

Quranic topics are expressed as themes. In the Qur'an, God employs a dramatic mode of presentation to guide humanity toward salvation, narrating His teachings in various forms. The Quranic concepts and themes are classified into discussions concerning:

"Monotheism, prophethood, resurrection, divine justice, Imamate, ethics, educational, political, and social systems, environmental issues, ontology." (Fazl al-Rahman, ٢٠١٨ AD/١٣٩٧ SH: ٢١)

Most Quranic stories share clear common ground and pursue shared objectives, namely the final triumph of truth over falsehood, the salvation of monotheists, and the misfortune of polytheists (Habibi et al., ٢٠١١ AD/١٣٩٠ SH: ٣١). This is seen where Prophet Noah survives the flood, the fire becomes a garden for Prophet Abraham, the staff of Prophet Moses devours the false serpents of the magicians and splits the sea, and Prophet Joseph is freed from prison and attains sovereignty.

#### General Classification of the Main Quranic Themes

In a general classification, the main themes of the Qur'an may be divided into five categories:

- |  |
|--|
| ١. Monotheistic doctrines (the three fundamental principles of monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection, and related topics such as reflection on divine signs and the prohibition of polytheism and hypocrisy) |
| ٢. Individual and social laws (acts of worship, social affairs, transactions, retribution, family matters, inheritance, and spoils of war)   |

|    |   |
|----|---|
| ٣. | Moral recommendations (wisdom, ethical and social issues, exhortation and guidance)   |
| ٤. | Human history centered on the prophets (stories of the prophets, historical events, former divine laws, and heavenly books) |
| ٥. | Educational and pedagogical themes (instruction, commands and prohibitions, human guidance, and anthropology)               |

**Table ١. Main Quranic Themes. Prepared by the authors.**

### **٥. Quranic Art**

Quranic art is a purposeful and committed form of art that is shaped in accordance with the truth-centered content of the Qur'an. From this perspective, modern Quranic art, in both form and content, is a true art created with the aim of promoting rational thinking and reflection across various artistic forms such as visual, dramatic, and auditory arts (Nasiri, ٢٠١٤ AD/١٣٩٣ SH: ٧٤).

Through its vivid imagery and dramatic narratives, the Qur'an presents abstract meanings, inner states, human archetypes, and scenes in a living, tangible, comprehensible, and harmonious manner (Qazizadeh, ٢٠١٠ AD/١٣٨٩ SH: ١٢٥).

Quranic art is a way of perceiving the world and a form of awareness that, in the skilled hands of an artist, elevates human beings toward higher realms of consciousness and connects them to the source of all beauty (Farghfouri, ٢٠٠٩ AD/١٣٨٧ SH: ٦٣).

Since the Holy Qur'an is a book of guidance whose audience spans all eras and social classes, fulfilling this mission requires attention to the diverse capacities of individuals and to the artistic utilization of the Qur'an's literary, linguistic, visual, and dramatic potentialities.

## **٦. Quranic Performing Arts**

Among the arts that have gained special importance in the contemporary era are the performing arts, which manifest themselves in forms such as theater, visual imagery and cinema. When the central theme of these arts is related to Quranic content, they are called Quranic performing arts (Hamidi Parsa & Heydari Khalili, ٢٠٢٢ AD/١٤٠١ SH: ٢١٢).

Artists can utilize Quranic dramatic arts to enhance understanding of Islamic culture, as art and literature are among the most significant tools for transmitting values and ideals today. Moreover, the use of dramatic methods is evident in the divine book of the Qur'an, which is the most complete educational model for human life. The historical background of employing dramatic narration for guidance and education in Islam goes back to one of the most compelling Quranic stories—the story of Joseph—presented in Surah Yusuf as one of the most beautiful dramatic tableaux (Afshari, ٢٠١٠ AD/١٣٨٩ SH: ٣١٥).

## **٧. Quranic Drama (Quranic Playwriting)**

Quranic drama refers to dramatic texts and works whose primary content and theme are related to Quranic narratives (Hamidi Parsa & Heydari Khalili, ٢٠٢٢ AD/١٤٠١ SH: ١٣٦). Quranic plays constitute a significant genre of drama that addresses noble moral values and human ideals and emphasizes the fundamental and serious subjects of human life.

This dramatic genre deals with human spirituality, the relationship between humans and transcendent forces, and essential life issues such as destiny, the soul, the afterlife, love, and social life. The first and most important feature of a Quranic play is the simplicity and understandability of the Qur'an and its stories. The language of

the Qur'an is comprehensible to all, and within this, the Qur'an's dramatic expression occupies a special place.

The second feature of Quranic drama is the reality and historical authenticity of the stories narrated in the Qur'an (Gholamrezaei & Majdami, ۲۰۱۴ AD/۱۳۹۳ SH: ۶۰–۶۱).

What primarily distinguishes Quranic plays from other plays is their source, the Qur'an, which places them within the category of adapted works. Most plays introduced as Quranic dramas narrate Quranic stories in greater detail and demonstrate a higher level of sensitivity and precision in their writing, since audiences are familiar with the original Quranic narratives. If they encounter content that contradicts what they have read in the Qur'an when watching a film or a theatrical performance, they may find it unacceptable (Gholamrezaei & Majdami, ۲۰۱۴ AD/۱۳۹۳ SH: ۶۱–۶۲). Therefore, sound knowledge of the Qur'an and its literary style is essential in writing Quranic plays.

## **۸. Discussion and Findings**

In the findings section, the collected data are analyzed using the chosen method.

### **۸.۱. Sample Reading of Contemporary Plays**

In the history of contemporary Iranian dramatic literature, there are plays in which authors have sought to incorporate ethical and human principles presented in the Qur'an into their works through various methods. These works are generally classified as religious plays.

In other cases, works written in various philosophical, social, historical, epic, and educational themes nevertheless reflect the same ethical and human values found in religious drama, albeit in a different genre. These can be referred to as general plays.

In this article, both religious and general contemporary Iranian plays have been selected. In this section, first a religious play and then a general play are examined and analyzed. Subsequently, the most important educational themes of the play "Parizad of the Forgotten City" are identified in Table ۲.

**Table ۲. Sample Reading of the Play Parizad of the Forgotten City  
(Designer: The Authors)**

| Row | Dramatic Dialogue  | Scene Description  | Coding   | Categorization                          |
|-----|--|--|--|---|
| ۱   | <p><b>Middle-aged Woman:</b> Azarakhsh, what are you saying? Why has this affliction been inflicted upon us?</p> <p><b>Azarakhsh:</b> Have you forgotten what you did to the Wise Old Man?!</p> <p><b>Old Man:</b> What did we do? He used to go to the mountain even before this...</p> <p><b>Azarakhsh:</b><br/>Yes, he went—and each time he returned to us with a sheaf of the wisdom of the Lord. But we wounded him with our own dishonor.</p> | The people know that the birth of stillborn infants in their land has been the consequence of their ingratitude and of hurting the heart of a worthy and wise man like the Wise Old Man. | Ingratitude and hurting hearts                     | Retribution                             |
| ۲   | <p><b>The Crowd:</b> O! Elder! What sin is this that carries such a heavy punishment?</p> <p><b>The Wise Old Man:</b> Forgetfulness. You have forgotten both yourselves and your Lord.</p>   | The people follow the Wise Old Man, and he considers the torment that has descended upon their tribe to be the result of forgetting God.   | Neglect of the Divine Presence and its Consequence | Forgetfulness of the Remembrance of God |
| ۳   | <p><b>The Wise Old Man:</b> Your remedy is the repentance of you all. Your Lord is Merciful and Forgiving. Return to Him so that once again He may send down upon you the rain of His mercy.</p>   | The Wise Old Man tells the people that in order for the punishment to be lifted, they must repent and seek God's forgiveness.  | Divine Forgiveness                                 | Acceptance of Repentance                |

|   |  |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| ٤ | <p><b>Another Woman:</b> These days, whenever I look into my little daughter's eyes, she turns her gaze away from me. I know what is passing through her heart.</p> <p><b>A Man:</b> Enough of these womanly lamentations... Instead of these cries, entrust everything to the Lord.</p> <p><b>Iblis (Satan):</b> Your hope... I want your hope. Give it to me and reclaim your knowledge.</p> | <p>Even after repentance, the people remain anxious and wait to see whether the affliction will be lifted from them or not.</p>                                     | <p>Expect to God forgiveness</p> <p>Hope for Satan</p> | <p>Trust and Hope in God</p> <p>Despair</p> |
| ٥ | <p><b>Parizad:</b> Father! The people of the city must give thanks. Tell the messengers— They must give thanks morning and evening, a thanksgiving worthy of their Lord.</p>   | <p>The affliction of childlessness is lifted from the people of the city, and it becomes incumbent upon them to give thanks for this blessing.</p>                  | <p>Gratitude for the Lifting of Affliction</p>         | <p>Thanksgiving</p>                         |
| ٦ | <p><b>Pirouz:</b> My father believed in supplication.</p> <p><b>Bakhtyar:</b> Yes, my lord, he did.</p> <p><b>Pirouz:</b> So do I.</p> <p><b>Bakhtyar:</b> hen pray. Pray.</p>   | <p>Pirouz the painter, who had been painting under the inspiration of Parizad's sorrowful song, when his auditory connection is cut off, turns to supplication.</p> | <p>Persistence in Supplication and Prayer</p>          | <p>Belief in the Efficacy of Prayer</p>     |
| ٧ | <p><b>Old Man:</b> Before a multitude of disciples and seekers of knowledge, he prostrated himself before an idol.</p> <p><b>Traveler:</b> What happened then?</p> <p><b>Old Man:</b> From that day on, faith departed from the people of this land. Here, brother shows no mercy to brother. A man sells his own mother for gold. Everyone has forgotten themselves.</p>                      | <p>The old man recounts to the traveler the story of Asmar's deviation and misguidance and its impact on the disbelief and faith of the people.</p>                 | <p>Sin Committed by the Faithful and the Learned</p>   | <p>The Sin and Deviation of the Elite</p>   |

The most significant educational themes of the play "Four Chests" are presented in Table ۳.

**Table ۳. Sample Analysis of the Play Four Chests**  
(Prepared by the authors)

| Row | Dramatic Dialogue  | Scene Description  | Coding   | Categorization                                  |
|-----|--|--|--|---|
| ۱   | <p>Black: Say something to him.</p> <p>Red: Yes, advise me. Guide me. Some people are only good at speaking. Some are made only for talking.</p> <p>Yellow: Who do you mean?</p> <p>Red: Someone who spoke bigger than his mouth!</p> <p>Yellow: I believe in whatever I say!</p> <p>Red: Well then, why are you hesitating? Why are you standing still?</p> | The characters lose the appropriate time for any action and become involved in argument and conflict with one another.   | Inconsistencies and dualities; debate and conflict | Disunity and lack of cohesion                   |
| ۲   | <p>Red: What are you saying? I'm done!</p> <p>Yellow: If there were any benefit, you would act. Do something yourselves.</p> <p>Green: I seek refuge in God.</p> <p>Yellow: How many times? Don't you ever say where God should seek refuge from you?</p> <p>Green: I will not interfere.</p>  | Due to the scarecrow's deception, the characters become suspicious and pessimistic. Then, considering their personal interests, they make excuses and prefer to incur the least possible loss. | Personal interests and excuse-making               | Monopolization and opportunism                  |
| ۳   | <p>They had become accustomed to their chests, and now it could even be said that they had grown attached to them. The reason was that they had not come out for years.</p>  | The scarecrow dominates the characters and persuades them to endure a difficult life inside the chests for a long time.  | Confiscation of thought and blind obedience        | Helplessness, thoughtlessness, and heedlessness |

|   |  |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| ٤ | <p>Yellow: Perhaps I will return and begin reforms from within.</p> <p>Green: I have thought deeply. On the contrary, my return is impossible. It would be tantamount to sudden death.</p> <p>Yellow: Really?</p> <p>Green: Yes, and besides, this opportunity does not always arise.</p> <p>Red: You mean that...</p> <p>Green: What about you?</p> <p>Red: Honestly, I have doubts.</p> <p>Green: Your doubt has caused doubt in me as well.</p> | <p>During the breaking of the chests, the characters' confusion and hesitation are clearly evident in both their actions and speech.</p> | <p>Confusion and stagnation; doubt and uncertainty</p> | <p>Multiple identities and disorientation</p> |
| ٥ | <p>Scarecrow: Chest number two, how are things?</p> <p>Yellow: Very good. In my chest, all kinds of safety and comfort facilities are available. We are equipped with an electric thermometer, an automatic cooling system, lottery tickets, and a free press.</p>   | <p>The scarecrow has colonized the characters, and they falsely and superficially praise the situation they are in.</p>                  | <p>Change of character and duplicity</p>               | <p>Lying and hypocrisy</p>                    |

## ٨,٢. Content Analysis of the Themes of Quranic Verses

In this section, based on the sample analysis of the plays and their coding and categorization, the themes of the Quranic verses are extracted and classified according to their Persian translations and interpretations to facilitate their coding and categorization.

Subsequently, the themes of the Quranic verses are formulated as educational thematic frameworks, and the similar verses for each category are identified. These are presented in Table ٤.

**Table ٤. Content Analysis of the Themes of Quranic Verses in the Plays**  
(Prepared by the authors)

| Row | Category                          | Translation of verse and similar verses   | Educational themes   | Play                          |
|-----|-----------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|
| ١   | Retribution of Deeds              | <p>"And those who believe and whose offspring follow them in faith—we shall join their offspring with them, and We shall not deprive them of anything of their deeds. Every person is held in pledge for what he has earned." (Ṭūr ٥٢:٢١)</p> <p>Also: An‘ām: ١٦٠; Rūm: ٤١; Shūrā: ٤٠</p> | <p>١. Each person’s actions always accompany them and never leave them.</p> <p>٢. One inevitably receives the outcome of one’s deeds.</p> <p>٣. Reward and punishment for all human actions are granted with justice.</p> <p>٤. Human actions in this world directly influence one’s Hereafter (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٩, ١٩).</p> | Parizad of the Forgotten City |
| ٢   | Neglect of the Remembrance of God | <p>"Whoever turns away from My remembrance—his life will be a narrow one, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind." (Ṭāhā: ١٢٤)</p> <p>Also: Ḥashr: ١٩; Ra‘d: ٢٨</p>  | <p>١. Neglect of God’s remembrance leads to anxiety and regret.</p> <p>٢. Inner peace is attainable only through remembrance of God.</p> <p>٣. Faith in God and attention to divine invocations reduce worry.</p>  |                               |

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|   |                                 |  | <p>٤. Hardships are the result of heedlessness toward God<br/>(Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٤, ٣١٤-٣١٥).</p>   |  |
| ٣ | Acceptance of Repentance        | <p>"Then after that, God accepts the repentance of whom He wills, and God is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Tawbah: ٣٧)<br/>Also: Mā'idah: ٣٤; Nūr: ٥; Ḥijr: ٤٩</p> | <p>١. Acceptance of sinners' repentance rests solely with God.<br/>٢. Acceptance of repentance is not obligatory upon God but a grace rooted in divine wisdom.<br/>٣. By promising forgiveness, God encourages His servants to repent.<br/>٤. In Islam, there is no dead-end; the path of return always remains open (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ٩, ٣٠٢-٣٠٣).</p> |  |
| ٤ | Trust in God and Hope / Despair | <p>"And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord except those who are astray?" (al-Ḥijr: ٥٦)<br/>Also: Ṭalāq: ٣; Nisā': ٨١; Zumar: ٥٣</p>                               | <p>١. Trust in God signifies being on the right path.<br/>٢. Despair is cured through remembrance of divine mercy.<br/>٣. One of the signs of the misguided is</p>   |  |

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|   |  |   | <p>despair of God's mercy.</p> <p>٤. The root of lack of trust in God and despair lies in ignorance of divine unity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩; ١٢, ٢٦٧-٢٦٨).</p>   |  |
| ٥ | Gratitude                              | <p>"He was ever grateful for the blessings of God; He chose him and guided him to a straight path." (Nahl: ١٢١)</p> <p>Also: Luqmān: ١٢; Ḥamd: ٢; Qamar: ٣٥</p> | <p>١. Pure servitude to God constitutes true gratitude.</p> <p>٢. The continuous gratitude of Prophet Abraham elevated him to divine election and made him a model for monotheists.</p> <p>٣. Gratitude is a blessing that guides human beings toward salvation (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩; ١٢, ٥٣٠).</p> |  |
| ٦ | Belief in the Efficacy of Supplication | <p>"So remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and do not deny Me." (Baqarah: ١٥٢)</p> <p>Also: Ghāfir: ١٤, ٦٠; Baqarah: ١٨٦; Āl 'Imrān: ١٠٣</p>    | <p>١. Remembrance of God and His blessings provides the ground for gratitude.</p> <p>٢. Neglect of God's remembrance leads to ingratitude.</p> <p>٣. God commands human beings to</p>  |  |

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|   |                                |   | <p>remember and glorify Him.</p> <p>۴. Divine grace encompasses humanity through remembrance of God (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۱, ۵۱۰-۵۱۳).</p>  |             |
| ۷ | Sin and Deviation of the Elite | <p>"Relate to them the story of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he detached himself from them; Satan pursued him, and he became one of the deviators."</p> <p>(A'rāf: ۱۷۵-۱۷۶)</p> <p>Also: Ṭāhā: ۱۲۱; Baqarah: ۴۴</p> | <p>۱. Heedlessness and surrender to the ego pave the way for the downfall of the elite.</p> <p>۷. Human salvation is not dependent solely on external factors or social status; divine will plays a decisive role.</p> <p>۳. One who persistently follows personal desires will not attain divine felicity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۸, ۴۳۳-۴۳۴).</p> |             |
| ۸ | Disunity and Lack of Cohesion  | <p>"Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge; indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart—each of these shall be questioned." (Isrā': ۳۶)</p>  | <p>۱. Conscious insistence on personal beliefs and the fostering of division fractures social unity.</p> <p>۷. Disunity destroys collective power.</p>   | Four chests |

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|    |   | Also: Baqarah: ١٧٠; A‘rāf : ٢٨; Luqmān: ٢١   | ٣. Fanaticism undermines convergence and mutual understanding.<br>٤. Opportunists and enemies exploit public disunity to dominate society (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, ١٩٩٩: ٣, ٥٧٩-٥٨٠).  |  |
| ٩  | Monopolization and Opportunism                  | "Indeed, whoever purifies himself has succeeded."<br>(A‘lā: ١٤)<br>Also: Ḥijr: ٩٩; Zumar: ٢; Anbīyā’: ٢٥   | ١. Some individuals join movements only when they foresee personal benefit.<br>٢. God values timely action and sincere participation, not delayed opportunistic involvement.<br>٣. Opportunists typically evade responsibility and blame others for their non-participation (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٨, ٤١٨). |  |
| ١٠ | Helplessness, Thoughtlessness, and Heedlessness | "We have certainly created many of the jinn and mankind for Hell. They have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see, and | ١. Hypocrites appear outwardly unified but are inwardly fragmented.<br>٢. Lack of reason is the primary cause of   |  |

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|    |                                      | <p>ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle—rather, more astray. They are the heedless ones."</p> <p>(A'rāf: ١٧٩)</p> <p>Also: Mā'idah: ٦٠;</p> <p>Baqarah: ٦٥</p>   | <p>their inner disintegration.</p> <p>٣. Internal division renders them helpless in times of crisis.</p> <p>٤. They ultimately face humiliation and misery (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٩, ٣٦٧).</p>  |  |
| ١١ | Multiple Identity and Disorientation | <p>And hold fast, all of you, to the rope of Allah [= the Quran and Islam, and any means of unity], and do not be divided! And remember the (great) favor of Allah upon you, how you were enemies, and He brought together your hearts, and by His favor you became brothers! And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, but Allah saved you from it; thus does Allah make clear to you His signs, that perhaps you may be guided (١٠٣ Āl 'Imrān).</p> <p>٥٣ Mu'minūn, ٩٣ Anbīyā', ٤٦ Anfāl</p> | <p>١. Indecisive individuals do not belong firmly to any social group.</p> <p>٢. The unstable efforts of the wavering never lead to a fixed destination.</p> <p>٣. Hypocrites are misled by God and thus lack a clear path.</p> <p>٤. Divine wrath leads to the bewilderment of the weak-willed and hesitant (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ٥, ١٩١).</p> |  |
| ١٢ | Lying and Hypocrisy                  | <p>"Everyone upon it will perish." (Rahman: ٢٦)</p>  | <p>١. The speech and actions of hypocrites are inconsistent.</p>   |  |

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|  |  | Also: Kahf ١٨; Yūnus ١٠;<br>Ghāfir: ٥٧ | ٢. Hypocrites lie and<br>use false oaths as a<br>shield.<br>٣. A heart sealed in<br>darkness inevitably<br>goes astray<br>(Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٩,<br>٤٧١–٤٧٢). |  |
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## ٨,٣. The Reflection of Qur'anic Educational Concepts and Themes in the Plays

In this section, based on the study's theoretical framework, the reflection of Qur'anic educational concepts and themes in the selected plays is examined, as presented in Table ٥.

**Table ٥. The Reflection of Qur'anic Educational Concepts and Themes in the Plays**  
(Compiled by the authors)

| Row | Verse Content   | Coding                  | Categorization      | Unit of Meaning   | Unit of Analysis   |
|-----|---|-------------------------|---------------------|---|--|
| ١   | Ṭūr: ٢١ — Every individual receives the outcome of his or her deeds, whether good or evil (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٩, ١٩). | Retribution for actions | Recompense of deeds | The people of the city suffer the consequences of their ingratitude and improper conduct. | Sentences and dialogues from the play Parizad of the City of the Forgotten |

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| ٢ | Ṭāhā: ١٢٤ — Negligence and distancing oneself from the remembrance of God bring about numerous afflictions (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٤, ٣١٤-٣١٥). | Forgetfulness of God and its consequences                | Forgetfulness of God                   | Forgetfulness of God has caused divine punishment to be sent upon the city's community.                  |  |
| ٣ | Tawbah: ٢٧ — The path of return to the divine way is always open, and God is accepting of repentance (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ٩, ٣٠٢-٣٠٣).        | Divine forgiveness                                       | Acceptability of repentance            | The people of the city repent and seek God's forgiveness to end the calamity.                            |  |
| ٤ | Hijr: ٥٦ — Trust in divine mercy and hope in God indicates that a person has not gone astray (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٢, ٢٦٧-٢٦٨).               | Hope in divine forgiveness/<br><br>Despair and deviation | Trust and hope in God/<br><br>Despair  | The people of the city hope for divine forgiveness after repenting.<br><br>Asmar loses his trust in God. |  |
| ٥ | Nahl: ١٢١ — Gratitude for divine blessings leads to an increase in blessings and to tranquility (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٢, ٥٣٠).                | Divine gratitude and increase of blessings               | Gratitude                              | The affliction of childlessness is removed from the city's people, and gratitude is expressed.           |  |
| ٦ | Baqarah: ١٥٢ — The remembrance and glorification of God draw divine attention to human affairs (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١, ٥١٠-٥١٣).              | Supplication and its outcome                             | Belief in the efficacy of supplication | The people of the city pray and seek goodness for one another.   |  |
| ٧ | A'rāf: ١٧٥-١٧٦ — True believers and the righteous must preserve their faith in conduct and action more firmly than others, lest their       | Firm faith among believers                               | Sin and deviation of the elite         | The deviation and misguidance of Asmar affect the faith and disbelief of the people.                     |  |

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|    | deviation lead large numbers of followers' astray (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۸, ۴۳–۴۴).  |                                      |   |   |   |
| ۸  | Āl 'Imrān: ۱۰۰ — God warns believers against division and discord after receiving divine truths and prohibits disunity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۳, ۵۷۹–۵۸۰).                                       | Unity and solidarity                 | Disunity and lack of cohesion                   | In this play, four characters of different colors, each symbolizing a social group, are portrayed, none of whom reach a compromise or mutual understanding. | Sentences and dialogues from the play Four Chests |
| ۹  | Fath: ۱۰ — Claimants and opportunists, through unfounded excuses, refuse to accompany the Prophet (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۱۸, ۴۱۸).   | Illegitimate self-interest           | Monopolism and opportunism                      | Members from different social classes seek personal gain through deceiving one another.   |   |
| ۱۰ | Ḥashr: ۱۴ — This verse, by drawing a fundamental contrast between true believers and hypocrites, points to the destructive influence of hypocrites on societies (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۱۹, ۳۶۷). | Influence and function of hypocrites | Helplessness, thoughtlessness, and heedlessness | Due to a lack of mutual understanding and bias against one another, members of society are unable to make sound decisions and become disoriented.           |   |
| ۱۱ | Verse Theme: Nisā': ۱۴۳ — Hypocrites fluctuate in confusion between faith and disbelief (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ۱۹۹۹: ۲, ۱۹۱).  | Loss of discernment                  | Multiple identity and confusion                 | Members of society fail to discover their true identity because they have distanced themselves from the truth and constantly sink into error.               |   |

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| ١٢ | Munāfiqūn: ٢ — The primary cause of hypocrisy lies in false oaths, concealment, and duplicity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٩: ١٩, ٤٧١–٤٧٢). | Moral vices | Falsehood and hypocrisy | The dramatic characters become hypocritical and deceitful as they lose their identity and follow a path of deviation. |  |
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## ٨,٤. The Educational Function of the Plays from a Qur'anic Perspective

### A) Parizad of the City of the Forgotten

The principal theme of this play centers on self-forgetfulness and negligence of the remembrance of God and reveals its social and individual consequences in worldly human life. God repeatedly calls human beings in the Qur'an to be mindful of Him and to remember His invocations. According to verse ١٩ of Surah *al-Hashr*:

"Do not be like those who forgot God, so He caused them to forget themselves; those are the defiantly disobedient."

Attention to divine remembrance leads to self-awareness and self-knowledge. Thus, human beings are constantly exposed to negligence, and God continually reminds them of this reality. The direct connection established in the continuation of the verse between forgetting God and forgetting the self reflects the depth of this issue. Therefore, if a person seeks to evaluate whether he has forgotten himself, and consequently whether he is on the right path, he must examine whether he has forgotten God in his life or whether he considers God in all aspects of his affairs.

In the second part of the play, the issue of moral lapses and sin among believers and the righteous is narrated, which is articulated through the concepts and themes of the Qur'anic verses.

Overall, in this play, the impact of the Qur'anic educational themes, particularly the forgetfulness of God and its consequences, along with attachment to carnal desires and the despair of divine mercy, appears substantial. The playwright has presented Qur'anic religious concepts through didactic thematic structures for audience transmission. In the tables presented, examples of Qur'anic verses that have shaped the play's principal concepts were identified. By drawing on Qur'anic themes, the playwright has incorporated educational motifs into the drama. Consequently, through the reflection of Qur'anic educational concepts and themes in the religious play *Parizad of the City of the Forgotten*, and the emphasis placed upon these themes, the didactic function of this play, based on Qur'anic indicators, becomes clear and evident.

### **B) The Play Four Chests**

The play *Four Chests*' social themes make it a suitable subject for examining its social motifs. The central axis of this play is the issue of human decision-making power and free will, grounded in rational reflection and, as a consequence, in peaceful coexistence with other members of society. From the perspective of the Holy Qur'an, the human being possesses a volitional dimension: a free agent who chooses at moments of moral and existential crossroads.

In a society where diverse thoughts and beliefs prevail, the role of individual reflection and rational deliberation is decisive in shaping social conditions. Concerning this existential dimension of the human being, the Qur'an states: "Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned," (al-Muddaththir: ٣٨) and likewise in verse ٣ of Surat *al-Insān*: "Indeed, We guided him to the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful." Hence, when a human being aligns his will and volition with the divine will, he attains a genuine resolve and true determination.

Moreover, the Holy Qur'an considers the cultivation of intellect and reason among the foundational elements of human identity. In the following two verses, God expresses the significance and unique status of rational reflection in this manner: "Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of God are the deaf and the dumb who do not reason," (al-Anfāl: ٢٢) and "It is not for any soul to believe except by God's permission, and He places defilement upon those who do not reason." (Yūnus: ١٠٠)

Based on Qur'anic exegesis, when a human being directs his resolve and efforts toward divine goals and places intellect and reason at the forefront, the conditions for the formation of a society with diverse and plural perspectives, yet grounded in Qur'anic and ethical criteria, are made possible. The content of this play, given its focus and emphasis on the role of human characteristics in the moral elevation of society, may therefore be classified among Qur'anic plays. The educational theme of the play, albeit indirectly through the articulation of indicators likewise addressed in the Qur'an, demonstrates that it encompasses Qur'anic themes.

## **Conclusion**

The narrative mode, simplicity, and general accessibility of both Qur'anic stories and verses in terms of content and thematic structure leave no doubt that, for representing Qur'anic concepts and themes, and, more fundamentally, for giving dramatic manifestation to Qur'anic verses, dramatic art in general and playwriting in particular constitute among the most appropriate and effective expressive forms of Qur'anic art and of the didactic and educational dimensions of the Book of Guidance.

With regard to the research problem of this article, which asserts that in the contemporary period there is a need to reconsider the definition of Qur'anic plays, and through the examination of the content of each of the analyzed plays based on

Qur'anic components, it was concluded that the credibility of Qur'anic narratives and teachings lies in their underlying thematic substance. This thematic substance, while preserving its essential content, can be articulated across various forms of contemporary drama through differing subjects, narrative structures, and modes of expression. From this perspective, no fundamental distinction exists, regarding the didactic function and educational message, between Qur'anic or religious drama and general drama; rather, both dramatic forms may align with Qur'anic objectives.

In response to the first research question, the case studies demonstrate that any play containing Qur'anic concepts and themes can be classified as a Qur'anic play, even in the absence of direct reference to explicit Qur'anic content. Qur'anic indicators, namely, the defining characteristics of Qur'anic arts to which Qur'anic drama also adheres, enable contemporary plays to embody the educational themes of the Qur'an while preserving their substantive content, and thus qualify as Qur'anic plays.

Through the examination and analysis of the religious play "Parizad of the City of the Forgotten" from a Qur'anic perspective, and in response to the second research question, it may be stated that this play, with its focus on neglect of the remembrance of God, self-forgetfulness, and despair of divine mercy, expresses concepts that emerge from the philosophy of faith and belief in the foundations of Islam. In essence, it is an ancient narrative derived from mystical literature, with a religious basis, that conveys truths and facilitates the understanding of ethical concepts. Accordingly, the components articulated in the Holy Qur'an are regarded as educational concepts and themes adapted within this play. Thus, a Qur'anic play comprises elements derived from the Qur'an's instructive and educational themes and dramatizes meanings that might otherwise be condensed into a single verse.

Finally, in response to the third research question, it is argued that, thus far, the definition of Qur'anic drama has faced both thematic limitations and conceptual obstacles. However, from a critical perspective, it may be inferred that Qur'anic

themes are presented indirectly within contemporary drama. That is, the same moral concepts and teachings articulated in the play "Four Chests" were previously expressed by God in the Qur'an in the form of didactic propositions. Consequently, drama conveys its function and message through Qur'anic themes, since all ethical and value-based dimensions of society are Qur'anic in nature and can be incorporated into diverse dramatic forms.

Therefore, Qur'anic thematic content serves as the foundation for the production of diverse Qur'anic dramatic works in the field of playwriting. Qur'anic drama is not confined to mere direct adaptations or repetitive retellings of Qur'anic narratives; rather, it encompasses a broader domain encompassing all themes connected to the content of the Qur'an, even when presented in outwardly distinct forms.

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