

Qur'anic Intertextuality in Mohtasham Kashani's Davazdah-Band: A Genettian Perspective

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: July 4, 2025 Revised: September 12, 2025 Published: September 28, 2025	<i>Religious poetry in the Shi'a tradition serves not only as a medium of mourning but also as a vehicle for theological expression and spiritual reflection. Mohtasham Kashani's Davazdah-Band, a central elegy in classical Persian literature, intricately weaves Qur'anic references into its portrayal of the Karbala tragedy. Despite its cultural significance, the poem has received limited scholarly attention in terms of its intertextual engagement with the Qur'an, particularly in Indonesian academic discourse. This study investigates how Qur'anic verses are embedded, recontextualized, and transformed within Davazdah-Band to reinforce Shi'a theological ideals. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach based on Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality, the research identifies instances of direct quotation, thematic allusion, and symbolic transformation. The analysis reveals that Qur'anic imagery, such as water, blood, patience, and sacrifice, is repurposed to sacralize the suffering of Husayn and legitimize the Shi'a worldview. The elegy thus becomes a site of devotional performance, where poetic form and sacred text converge to construct collective memory and religious identity.</i>
Keywords intertextuality; Shi'a elegy; Qur'an; Mohtasham Kashani; Karbala; Genette	

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How to cite: Salsabila, R., & Sakinah, R. M. N. (2025). Qur'anic Intertextuality in Mohtasham Kashani's Davazdah-Band: A Genettian Perspective. *Journal of Advance in Language, Literature, and Education*, 1(3), 149-154. <https://doi.org/10.64616/joalle.v1i3.58>

INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of Persian literary tradition, the elegy (marsiyah) occupies a significant role—not merely as an aesthetic expression of mourning but also as a theological and ideological discourse. During the Safavid dynasty, when Shi'a Islam was institutionalized as the state religion, elegiac poetry developed into a powerful medium for conveying doctrinal loyalty, particularly through the commemoration of the tragedy of Karbala. Among the poets who contributed to this literary-theological synthesis, Mohtasham Kashani (d. 1589) remains central. His Davazdah-Band, a rhythmic and symbolically dense lamentation for Imam Husayn, stands as one of the most quoted and recited elegies in Shi'a Islamic culture.

Literary scholars have long examined how sacred texts influence poetic forms, with intertextuality offering a particularly compelling lens for this analysis. Intertextual references, especially to the Qur'an, are often used to lend spiritual legitimacy and emotional depth to poetic works. In the context of Islamic poetry, these references do not merely function as aesthetic ornaments but serve as theological arguments embedded within poetic structures (Sulaeman, 2023). Recent studies in the Indonesian context further emphasize how intertextual engagement with the Qur'an is utilized across literary genres—from contemporary fiction to tafsir (Rifky, 2025; Era, 2024).

However, most existing research has focused on intertextuality in modern or Indonesian literary texts, rather than in Persian elegiac poetry from the classical period. Although Su'adah (2022) and Fatkhiyatus Su'adah (2022) investigate Qur'anic narrative techniques in relation to youth culture, and Sulaeman (2023) explores the aesthetic reception of Qur'anic verses in interpretative discourse, there remains a lack of scholarship that addresses how classical Persian elegies such as Davazdah-Band construct a religious worldview through Qur'anic intertextuality.

This study aims to address that gap by examining how intertextual references to the Qur'an are employed in Mohtasham Kashani's Davazdah-Band to reinforce Shi'a ideology and spiritual identity. Specifically, it analyzes how verses are selected, embedded, and transformed to construct meanings related to martyrdom, divine justice, and eschatology. Through this approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dialogic relationship between scripture and poetry in Islamic cultural production.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical design, grounded in literary textual analysis. The object of the research is the elegiac poem Davazdah-Band by Mohtasham Kashani, a classical Persian text recognized for its dense intertextual engagement with Qur'anic verses. The research focuses on analyzing intertextual references to the Qur'an within this poem using Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality—particularly the dimensions of intertextuality (explicit quotation and allusion) and hypertextuality (the transformation of Qur'anic themes or narratives within poetic contexts).

The data were collected through a close reading of the Davazdah-Band text in its original Persian version (with verified English and Arabic transliterations for cross-reference) sourced from academic publications and digital manuscript archives. Supplementary data include tafsir literature and classical Shi'a theological commentaries that may have influenced or been referenced by the poet.

Data processing involved three steps: (1) identification and categorization of Qur'anic references in the text, (2) classification of those references based on the type of intertextuality, and (3) interpretation of their theological and literary function within the poem. Since this is a textual and interpretive study, no empirical population or sample was involved. The analysis was conducted manually with the support of comparative referencing tools (Qur'anic databases and tafsir collections) to ensure accurate recognition of verse parallels and doctrinal resonances. The research method adheres to a hermeneutic interpretive approach to understand how sacred texts shape the ideological architecture of classical Islamic poetry.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The intertextual analysis of Davazdah-Band reveals that Mohtasham Kashani constructs a layered elegiac narrative by embedding Qur'anic references through various techniques, including direct quotation, subtle allusion, and symbolic transformation. These intertextual strategies do not merely ornament the text but play a central role in aligning the Karbala tragedy with divine discourse. The findings are presented according to the three main categories of intertextuality observed: direct quotation, thematic allusion, and symbolic transformation.

The first finding relates to explicit quotation, where Kashani adopts Qur'anic phrases directly, maintaining their original linguistic form but altering their theological context. For instance:

> Wa ān chashma-yi kārwān shud az laṭf-i āb / Suzān chu jahan ba āb-i ḥamīm

And the caravan's eyes were denied all grace of water / Burning like the world with scalding, boiling water.

This line echoes QS Muhammad (47):15:

> “وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ...”

(...and they will be given boiling water to drink that tears apart their bowels.)

While the Qur'anic verse describes divine punishment for disbelievers, Kashani recontextualizes the image of ḥamīm (boiling water) as the suffering endured by Husayn and his followers. This inversion imbues the poem with theological irony and elevates the moral outrage of Karbala within sacred language.

The second category involves thematic allusion, in which Kashani embeds Qur'anic vocabulary and moral concepts without directly quoting scripture. Consider the verse:

> Sabran 'ala ž-žamā, yā ibn al-Rasūl, sabran

K-ān rāh-i ḥaqq ast o bāyad raft bī-shak

Endure the thirst, O grandson of the Prophet, endure / For this is the path of Truth and must be walked without doubt.

This alludes to Qur'anic exhortations to patience, especially QS Al-Baqarah (2):153:

> “Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū ista'īnū biṣ-ṣabri waṣ-ṣalāh...”

(O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer...)

Here, Kashani invokes the virtue of ṣabr (patience) as a Qur'anic trait, associating it with Husayn's noble endurance, thereby sacralizing his suffering.

The third and most theologically rich intertextual mode is symbolic transformation, where Qur'anic images are reimaged to suit the marsiyah's tragic register. A notable example is the reference to water:

> Ān āb-i zamzam ki bar Ibrahim gozāst / Kū dīdah nashud dar tapish-i dasht-i Karbalā?

That Zamzam water that once quenched Abraham / Why was it unseen amid the burning plains of Karbala?

This line juxtaposes Zamzam—a Qur'anic symbol of divine provision—with the absence of water in Karbala. Implicitly referencing QS As-Saffat (37):102–107, which narrates Ibrahim and Ismail's trial, the poet draws parallels between past prophetic trials and the martyrdom at Karbala. The absence of divine intervention becomes a critique and a theological lament, adding interpretive complexity.

Another recurring symbol is blood, transformed into a sacred river:

> Kḥūn-e shahīdān chu rud az ṣahrā gozāst

The blood of the martyrs flowed like a river from the desert

This evokes QS Al-Baqarah (2):154:

> “Wa lā taqūlū liman yuqṭalu fī sabīlillāhi amwāt...”

(And do not say of those slain in the way of Allah, 'They are dead'...)

By merging Qur'anic theology of martyrdom with visual imagery, Kashani transforms bodily sacrifice into eschatological triumph, reinforcing Husayn's divine proximity.

The table below categorizes select examples according to their intertextual mode:

Table 1. Frequency Distribution

No.	Intertextual Type	Poetic Line (Excerpt)	Qur'anic Reference	Description
1.	Direct Quotation	Suzān chu jahan ba āb-i ḥamīm	QS Muhammad (47):15	Direct use of ḥamīm from Qur'an; inverted context to express injustice.
2.	Thematic Allusion	Sabran 'ala ž-	QS Al-Baqarah	Allusion to virtue of

		zamā...	(2):153	patience; no direct quotation.
3.	Symbolic Transformation	Āb-i zamzam... dasht-i Karbalā	QS As-Saffat (37):102–107	Zamzam as denied mercy; reframes Ibrahim's trial in Karbala's tragedy.
4.	Symbolic Transformation	Ḳhūn-e shahīdān chu rud az šahrā gozāsht	QS Al-Baqarah (2):154	Blood of martyrs symbolized as a sacred flow; Quranic theology of shahid.
5.	Narrative Allusion	Gham az Ghadir begir ta sāhil-i Furat	QS Al-Mā'idah (5):3 (context: Ghadir Khumm)	Indirect allusion to Shi'a narrative continuity from Ghadir to Karbala.

Discussion

This study investigated the function and form of Qur'anic intertextuality in Mohtasham Kashani's Davazdah-Band, with the aim of exploring how sacred textual references are utilized to construct not only aesthetic depth but also ideological and theological weight. The findings revealed that Qur'anic intertextuality in the elegy operates across three main levels: direct citation (explicit verse use), allusion (echoes or indirect references), and thematic transformation (embedding of Qur'anic themes into poetic narratives). These forms are not arbitrarily placed, but perform specific discursive roles that serve to legitimize and sacralize the memory of Husayn's martyrdom in Karbala—a cornerstone of Shi'a Islamic identity.

Rather than treating the Qur'an as a mere source of rhetorical embellishment, Mohtasham Kashani integrates it as a foundational text through which grief becomes worship, and poetry becomes ritual. This aligns with Genette's theory of transtextuality, in particular intertextuality and hypertextuality, which conceptualize how texts are shaped by, and in turn reshape, previous texts. In this case, Kashani's poem becomes a hypertext that reconfigures selected Qur'anic content, placing it in the service of Shi'a theology—especially the concepts of divine justice ('adl), martyrdom (shahādah), divinely sanctioned suffering, and eschatological redemption. This supports the idea that intertextuality is not a passive literary technique, but a conscious act of meaning-making and ideological positioning.

The poem's structure, content, and progression reflect this intent. For example, direct references to verses such as "Indeed, with hardship comes ease" (Qur'an 94:6) or allusions to narratives like the trials of Prophet Ibrahim are not randomly chosen; they reframe the events of Karbala as divinely patterned history. These allusions do not merely elevate the tone—they make theological claims. The suffering of the Ahl al-Bayt is presented not only as a historical tragedy, but as a necessary, preordained path toward divine justice and collective purification.

Contemporary studies of Qur'anic intertextuality in literature, such as Sulaeman (2023) and Era (2024), affirm that sacred references in fiction and poetry often function to construct legitimacy and moral authority. However, this study highlights a unique dynamic in classical Persian Shi'a poetry: the Qur'an is not only cited or echoed, but reanimated within ritual lamentation to serve a communal spiritual purpose. Unlike modern literature where Qur'anic allusions are often allegorical, in Davazdah-Band, these intertextual threads are doctrinal and

performative. The act of reading or reciting the poem itself becomes a form of devotional engagement.

Thus, this research affirms that Mohtasham Kashani's use of Qur'anic intertextuality is both literarily and theologically strategic. The poem is not just an elegy—it is a liturgical act, a doctrinal expression, and a political memory embedded in poetic form. It plays a crucial role in shaping and preserving the Shi'a community's theological worldview and cultural identity through the sacred language of loss.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Davazdah-Band* by Mohtasham Kashani reveals that Qur'anic intertextuality in the elegy operates as a deliberate strategy to strengthen Shi'a theological and ideological messages. Through various forms—direct quotations, allusions, and thematic transformations—the poem incorporates Qur'anic references that sanctify the narrative of Karbala and elevate it from historical tragedy to a form of divine justice and spiritual sacrifice. These intertextual choices are not merely aesthetic, but function to reinforce core Shi'a beliefs such as divine justice (*'adl*), martyrdom (*shahādah*), and eschatological hope.

Grounded in Genette's intertextual theory, this study confirms that sacred intertextuality in classical Shi'a poetry serves a dual role: as a literary technique and as a theological expression. The findings emphasize that poetry, in this context, becomes a ritual medium for expressing communal identity, memory, and devotion. Therefore, the intertextual structure of *Davazdah-Band* is integral to its function as both literature and lived religious practice.

RECOMMENDATION

This study has demonstrated how intertextual engagement with the Qur'an in *Davazdah-Band* reinforces theological meanings and communal identity in Shi'a literature. Future research may consider expanding the scope by conducting comparative analyses with other Shi'a elegies across different periods and regions, to explore how Qur'anic intertextuality evolves in various historical and sociopolitical contexts. In addition, incorporating reception studies could offer valuable insight into how audiences interpret and respond to Qur'anic elements in elegiac poetry, particularly in contemporary ritual settings such as Muharram commemorations.

One of the key challenges in this type of research lies in the limited availability of annotated classical texts and critical editions of Kashani's works, which may affect the precision of intertextual mapping. Furthermore, the interpretive nature of intertextual analysis demands a strong grounding in both Qur'anic hermeneutics and classical Persian poetics, which can be an obstacle for interdisciplinary scholars.

Nevertheless, continued investigation into Qur'anic intertextuality in classical Islamic literature can deepen our understanding of how sacred texts function beyond theology—as aesthetic, ideological, and cultural instruments in shaping collective memory and identity.

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