



## Teaching *King Oedipus* at an Islamic University: Challenges and Pedagogical Approaches

Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of English Language and Literature  
International Islamic University Chittagong  
kaosarahmed@iiuc.ac.bd

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### Abstract

The teaching of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* in Islamic universities presents a series of intellectual, ethical, and theological challenges. The play's themes—fate vs. free will, incest, suicide, and Greek mythology—may conflict with Islamic teachings and cultural sensitivities. This paper explores the pedagogical issues surrounding the inclusion of *King Oedipus* in an Islamic university curriculum and proposes approaches for balancing literary appreciation with religious and ethical considerations. By analysing the compatibility of the play's themes with Islamic perspectives on morality, fate, and human agency, this research offers practical strategies for integrating *King Oedipus* in a way that respects both academic inquiry and Islamic values.

*Keywords:* Islamic perspectives, morality, fate, human agency, pedagogical issues

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## 1. Introduction

Literary classics play a crucial role in shaping critical thinking and cultural literacy. However, in religiously affiliated institutions—particularly Islamic universities—certain texts may present conflicts between literary value and religious doctrine. Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, a central text in world literature, is widely studied for its exploration of tragic fate, human hubris, and moral dilemmas. Yet, its themes of incest, suicide, and Greek mythology pose challenges within an Islamic educational framework. This paper examines these concerns in detail and offers strategies for teaching *King Oedipus* at an Islamic university while maintaining sensitivity to Islamic beliefs and values.

## 2. Theological and Ethical Concerns

### 2.1. Fate and Free Will in Islamic Theology vs. *King Oedipus*

One of the most profound themes in *King Oedipus* is the tension between fate (*moira* in Greek) and free will. The play portrays Oedipus as a man trapped by destiny, despite his best efforts to avoid it. In contrast, Islamic theology presents a nuanced understanding of fate (*qadar*), which includes both divine decree and human agency. This section explores how the concept of fate in *King Oedipus* compares to Islamic perspectives and how educators can use this contrast to enrich student discussions.

### 2.1.1. *The Concept of Fate in King Oedipus*

In *King Oedipus*, Sophocles presents fate as an inescapable force. The Delphic Oracle prophesies that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. Both Oedipus' parents, King Laius and Queen Jocasta, and Oedipus himself attempt to thwart this destiny:

- Laius and Jocasta abandon Oedipus to die as an infant.
- Oedipus, upon hearing the prophecy, leaves Corinth to avoid harming his supposed parents.

However, despite their efforts, fate unfolds exactly as foretold:

- Oedipus unknowingly kills his real father in a dispute on the road.
- He later marries his biological mother, fulfilling the prophecy.

This deterministic view of fate suggests that no human action can alter destiny. Even Oedipus' intelligence and leadership cannot save him from divine predestination.

### 2.1.2. *Fate and Free Will in Islamic Theology*

In Islam, the concept of *qadar* (divine predestination) is an essential article of faith. However, Islamic teachings offer a more balanced view between divine decree and human responsibility. *The Qur'an* states:

Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Qur'an 13:11)

This verse emphasizes that while Allah has ultimate knowledge of fate, human beings have the ability to make choices that shape their destiny. Unlike the Greek view, where fate is an unavoidable external force, Islamic belief holds that:

- i. Allah has knowledge of all things (past, present, and future), but this does not mean humans lack free will.
- ii. Humans are accountable for their choices, even though Allah knows what they will choose.
- iii. Divine decree does not override personal effort—people must strive to do good and avoid wrongdoing.

### 2.1.3. *Key Differences Between Greek and Islamic Views on Fate*

Aspect	Greek Tragic Fate (Oedipus)	Islamic Perspective on Fate ( <i>Qadar</i> )
<i>Nature of Fate</i>	Deterministic and unchangeable	Foreknowledge exists, but free will is granted.
<i>Role of Prophecy</i>	Unavoidable—prophecy is always fulfilled	Allah knows all outcomes, but humans make choices.
<i>Human Agency</i>	Limited—efforts to change fate are futile	Humans are accountable for their choices.
<i>Divine Justice</i>	Gods do not necessarily act mercifully.	Allah is <i>just</i> and <i>merciful</i> , allowing repentance.
<i>Outcome</i>	Tragic suffering despite innocence	Reward and punishment are based on effort and intention.

## 2.2. **Incest and Moral Boundaries**

The core tragedy of *King Oedipus*—unintentionally committing incest with his mother—presents an ethical dilemma. Islamic morality strongly condemns incest, viewing it as a grave sin (Qur'an 4:23). Some students may find discussing this theme uncomfortable or inappropriate. The play portrays this as

a tragic accident rather than a deliberate sin, incest remains a deeply sensitive issue, particularly in Islamic contexts where moral purity and family structures are of paramount importance

### 2.2.1. Incest in *King Oedipus*

The tragedy of *King Oedipus* revolves around the fulfillment of a prophecy that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. Despite efforts to avoid this fate, he ultimately marries Queen Jocasta, his biological mother, and they have children together. When the truth is revealed: Jocasta commits suicide out of shame and horror; and Oedipus blinds himself as an act of self-punishment and flees in disgrace. The play presents incest as an unavoidable curse rather than a moral failing. However, in an Islamic framework, the concept of *qadar* (divine decree) does not negate human responsibility, and incest is viewed as one of the gravest sins.

### 2.2.2. Incest in Islamic Teachings

Islam strictly prohibits incest (*zina al-mahram*), viewing it as a severe moral and social transgression. *The Qur'an* explicitly outlines the relatives whom one is forbidden to marry:

Prohibited to you [for marriage] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your father's sisters, your mother's sisters, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your [milk] mothers who nursed you, your sisters through nursing, your wives' mothers, and your stepdaughters under your guardianship. (Qur'an 4:23)

This verse establishes a strong moral boundary against incest, emphasizing that such relationships are unnatural and against divine law. Furthermore, Islamic jurisprudence classifies incest as a form of *zina* (fornication/adultery), which carries severe legal and spiritual consequences.

### Consequences of Incest in Islam

- i. Moral Corruption:
  - o Islam emphasizes the sanctity of the family unit. Incest threatens the foundation of family structures, creating confusion in lineage and disrupting societal order.
- ii. Spiritual and Legal Punishment:
  - o Incest is considered a major sin (*kabirah*), with serious consequences both in this life and the hereafter.
  - o Islamic law (Shari'ah) prescribes severe punishments for *zina*, especially when it involves close relatives.
- iii. Psychological and Social Impact:
  - o Islamic ethics emphasize the importance of maintaining modesty (*haya*). Incest not only violates moral values but also leads to deep psychological trauma, as seen in the despair of Oedipus and Jocasta.

### 2.2.3. The Role of Shame and Guilt in *King Oedipus* vs. Islamic Ethics

Both *King Oedipus* and Islamic teachings recognize that incest leads to immense shame and suffering. However, their responses to the moral crisis differ significantly:

Aspect	Greek Perspective ( <i>King Oedipus</i> )	Islamic Perspective
<i>Fate vs. Choice</i>	Oedipus' incest is inevitable, dictated by prophecy.	Humans have free will, and divine decree does not justify sin.
<i>Moral Judgment</i>	Incest is tragic but not morally condemned (since it was unintentional).	Incest is a grave sin with serious legal and moral consequences.

<i>Response to Discovery</i>	Jocasta commits suicide; Oedipus blinds himself in despair.	Islam encourages repentance ( <i>tawba</i> ) rather than self-destruction.
<i>Divine Justice</i>	The gods punish Oedipus through suffering and exile.	Islam offers redemption through sincere repentance and divine mercy.

While *King Oedipus* treats incest as an unavoidable horror, Islamic thought emphasizes that even great sins can be forgiven through repentance (*tawba*). This contrast offers a valuable teaching opportunity.

### 2.3. Suicide and Self-Harm

Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-inflicted blindness raise issues concerning self-harm. Islam forbids suicide, emphasizing patience and seeking divine help in adversity (Qur'an 4:29). The play's tragic conclusion, where self-destruction is seen as a form of justice, contradicts Islamic teachings on repentance and divine mercy. One of the most emotionally intense aspects of *King Oedipus* is the response of Oedipus and Jocasta upon discovering the truth about their identities and actions. Jocasta, in utter despair, commits suicide, while Oedipus blinds himself in an act of self-punishment. These actions raise significant ethical and theological concerns, particularly within an Islamic framework, where suicide and self-harm are strictly prohibited. This section explores how suicide and self-inflicted punishment are portrayed in *King Oedipus*, contrasts them with Islamic teachings, and discusses pedagogical strategies for addressing this sensitive topic in an Islamic university.

#### 2.3.1. Suicide and Self-Harm in *King Oedipus*

Sophocles presents both suicide and self-harm as responses to overwhelming shame and guilt:

i. **Jocasta's Suicide:**

- Upon realizing that she has unknowingly married her son and borne his children, Jocasta cannot bear the horror of her fate.
- She retreats into her chambers and hangs herself, choosing death over public disgrace.

ii. **Oedipus' Self-Blinding:**

- Rather than ending his life, Oedipus chooses to blind himself using the golden pins from Jocasta's dress.
- He justifies this act by claiming he does not deserve to see the world after committing such a horrendous crime.
- This self-inflicted punishment serves as a form of atonement, ensuring that Oedipus continues to suffer rather than escape through death.

From a Greek tragic perspective, these acts reflect the extreme consequences of fate and human suffering. However, from an Islamic perspective, both suicide and self-harm are considered severe transgressions.

#### 2.3.2. Suicide and Self-Harm in Islamic Teachings

Islamic teachings emphasize the sanctity of life, viewing suicide and self-harm as prohibited acts. *The Qur'an* and *Hadith* provide clear guidance on this issue:

i. *The Sanctity of Life in The Qur'an*

*The Qur'an* explicitly forbids self-harm and suicide:

And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful.  
(Qur'an 4:29)

This verse highlights that human life is sacred and should not be destroyed, even in moments of extreme despair. Islam teaches that hardships and suffering are tests from Allah and that patience (*sabr*) and trust in divine wisdom are necessary.

**ii. The Prohibition of Suicide in Hadith**

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) strongly condemned suicide. Several *Hadith* emphasize its prohibition:

Whoever kills himself with something in this world will be punished with it on the Day of Judgment. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 5778)

A man was inflicted with wounds, and he committed suicide, and so Allah said: ‘My servant has himself caused his life to end, so I forbid Paradise for him.’ (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 3463)

These *Hadith* emphasize that suicide is not an escape from suffering but a grave act that has eternal consequences.

**iii. The Islamic Concept of Trials and Patience**

Islam teaches that suffering is part of human life and serves as a test of faith. Instead of resorting to self-harm, believers are encouraged to seek refuge in Allah through *dua* (prayer), exercise patience (*sabr*) and trust that hardships bring spiritual growth and eventual relief.

**iv. Repentance (Tawba) vs. Self-Punishment**

Unlike the Greek tragic worldview, where suffering and self-inflicted punishment are seen as inevitable and even honorable, Islam emphasizes repentance (*tawba*) as the proper response to mistakes or sins:

- Repentance is always open: No matter how grave a sin is, sincere *tawba* ensures Allah’s forgiveness.
- Self-inflicted suffering is unnecessary: Islam does not endorse physical punishment for personal sins; instead, believers should seek forgiveness and strive to rectify their actions.

**2.3.3. Key Differences Between Greek and Islamic Views on Suicide and Self-Harm**

Aspect	Greek Perspective ( <i>King Oedipus</i> )	Islamic Perspective
<i>Reason for Suicide/Self-Harm</i>	Shame, guilt, and inescapable fate	Despair and lack of trust in divine mercy
<i>Cultural Perception</i>	Seen as tragic but honorable in some cases	Considered a major sin, as life belongs to Allah
<i>Religious Consequences</i>	Fate-driven suffering, no hope for redemption	Suicide leads to punishment in the afterlife.
<i>Moral Response</i>	Self-inflicted punishment is justified.	Repentance and seeking divine forgiveness are required.

**2.4. Greek Mythology vs. Islamic Monotheism**

*King Oedipus* is deeply rooted in Greek mythology, referencing gods such as Apollo and oracles like Delphi. The Islamic worldview, based on strict monotheism (*tawhid*), rejects polytheistic narratives. While classical Islamic scholars engaged with Greek thought in philosophy and science, direct engagement with polytheistic literature can be sensitive.

One of the key theological challenges when teaching *King Oedipus* in an Islamic university is its reliance on Greek mythology, which is deeply polytheistic. The play invokes multiple Greek gods, particularly Apollo, whose prophecy dictates Oedipus' fate. This directly contrasts with Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), which emphasizes the oneness of God (*Allah*) and rejects polytheistic belief systems. This section explores the portrayal of divine power and intervention in *King Oedipus*, contrasts it with Islamic theology, and provides pedagogical strategies for addressing these differences in an Islamic academic setting.

#### 2.4.1. *The Role of Greek Gods in King Oedipus*

Greek mythology is central to the structure of *King Oedipus*. The gods serve as omnipotent forces governing human destiny, particularly:

##### i. *Apollo and the Oracle of Delphi*

- Apollo, the Greek god of prophecy and truth, plays a crucial role in determining Oedipus' fate.
- The Oracle at Delphi, considered Apollo's mouthpiece, delivers the prophecy that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother.
- Throughout the play, characters seek divine guidance through oracles and prophetic visions.

##### ii. *The Greek Concept of Fate (Moirai)*

- The ancient Greeks believed that fate (*moira*) was predetermined and could not be escaped, even by the gods.
- Oedipus, despite his intelligence and efforts, cannot defy the prophecy, reinforcing the tragic inevitability of fate.
- The gods, particularly Apollo, are portrayed as distant figures who reveal human destiny but do not offer mercy or redemption.

##### iii. *Rituals and Divine Retribution*

- The people of Thebes believe that their suffering (the plague) is a punishment from the gods.
- Greek tragedy often depicts human suffering as a result of divine will rather than personal moral failings.

These elements contrast sharply with Islamic theology, where divine justice, mercy, and monotheism are foundational.

#### 2.4.2. *The Islamic View of God and Divine Will*

##### i. *The Oneness of God (Tawhid)*

Islam is strictly monotheistic, emphasizing that Allah is the sole creator and controller of the universe. *The Qur'an* repeatedly rejects the concept of multiple deities:

Say, 'He is Allah, [who is] One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent.' (Qur'an 112:1-4)

This verse directly contradicts the polytheistic worldview of Greek mythology, where gods have human-like attributes, engage in conflicts, and influence human affairs arbitrarily.

**ii. Divine Will and Human Responsibility**

Islamic theology presents a more balanced view of fate and free will:

- a. Allah is All-Knowing, but human beings have the power to make choices.
- b. Divine justice is absolute, meaning that people are held accountable for their actions rather than being doomed by inescapable fate.

*The Qur'an* states:

Indeed, Allah does not wrong the people at all, but it is the people who are unjust to themselves. (Qur'an 10:44)

This concept contrasts with *King Oedipus*, where Oedipus suffers despite his innocence, simply because of a prophecy.

**iii. Prophecy in Islam vs. Greek Mythology**

Both Greek mythology and Islamic tradition feature prophecy, but with key differences:

Aspect	Greek Mythology (King Oedipus)	Islamic View (Qur'an & Hadith)
Source of Prophecy	Oracles and seers (e.g., Delphi)	Divine revelation through Prophets
Nature of Prophecy	Fatalistic, inescapable fate	A warning that allows moral choice
Divine Justice	Gods impose suffering without clear moral cause	Allah judges based on righteousness and intent
Human Agency	Limited—efforts to escape fate fail	Humans have free will and are accountable

Unlike Greek oracles, who dictate unavoidable fates, Islamic prophecy (*nubuwwah*) serves to guide humans toward righteousness.

**2.4.3. The Role of Divine Justice: Greek Mythology vs. Islamic Theodicy**

A major theological difference between Greek mythology and Islam is the concept of divine justice:

**i. In Greek Mythology: Gods Are Arbitrary and Unpredictable**

- The gods do not necessarily act morally; they often act on whims.
- Divine punishment does not always align with human actions.
- Even good characters (e.g., Oedipus, Antigone) suffer due to divine will.

**ii. In Islam: Allah Is Just and Merciful**

- *The Qur'an* emphasizes that Allah does not punish without reason.
- Mercy is central—those who repent (*tawba*) are forgiven.
- Suffering is a test rather than an arbitrary punishment.

*The Qur'an* states:

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient. (Qur'an 2:155)

This concept starkly contrasts with *King Oedipus*, where Oedipus' suffering is inevitable, with no hope for redemption.

### 3. Pedagogical Strategies for Teaching *King Oedipus* in an Islamic University

#### 3.1. Contextualizing the Play as a Literary and Philosophical Work

To avoid theological conflicts, instructors can frame *King Oedipus* as a study in human psychology, leadership, and the nature of knowledge rather than a religious or moral guide. Teaching *King Oedipus* in an Islamic university requires a careful balance between literary appreciation and cultural sensitivities. To ensure that the play is both academically valuable and respectful of Islamic perspectives, educators must contextualize it within a broader literary and philosophical framework. This approach shifts the focus from religious or moral conflicts to themes of human nature, governance, knowledge, and the limits of human understanding. This section explores strategies for framing *King Oedipus* in a way that enriches students' critical thinking while maintaining sensitivity to Islamic values.

##### 3.1.1. Viewing *King Oedipus* as a Study in Tragic Literature

###### a. The Definition and Role of Tragedy

- *King Oedipus* is a classic example of Greek tragedy, a literary form that explores human suffering, fate, and moral dilemmas.
- Aristotle, in *Poetics*, identifies it as the perfect model of tragedy due to its structure, character development, and emotional impact (*catharsis*).
- In an Islamic university, the play can be studied as an exploration of tragic flaw (*hamartia*), reversal (*peripeteia*), and recognition (*anagnorisis*)—all literary concepts that apply to diverse cultures.

###### b. Islamic and Arabic Traditions of Tragic Literature

- While tragedy as a genre is less emphasized in Islamic literary tradition, Arabic literature contains deep explorations of fate, human suffering, and moral choices.
- Examples from Islamic literature:
  - **Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan***: Explores human reason and self-discovery.
  - **Persian Sufi Poetry (Rumi, Attar)**: Discusses suffering as a means of spiritual enlightenment.
  - **The Fall of Andalusia (Al-Andalus)**: Often portrayed as a tragic historical event with literary reflections.

###### Application in Teaching

- Students can compare *King Oedipus* with tragic elements in Islamic literature.
- Encourage discussions on whether tragedy aligns with Islamic views on fate and divine justice.

##### 3.1.2. Exploring the Play as a Political and Ethical Commentary

###### a. Leadership and Moral Responsibility

- Oedipus is not just a victim of fate but also a ruler who must make decisions affecting his people.
- His journey can be analysed in terms of political ethics, governance, and leadership mistakes.

### b. Comparing Oedipus with Islamic Leaders

- In Islamic history, rulers such as Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and Salahuddin Al-Ayyubi (Saladin) are examples of just and wise leaders.
- Educators can pose questions like:
  - "How does Oedipus' leadership compare with Islamic models of governance?"
  - "What can modern leaders learn from his mistakes?"

### c. The Role of Justice and Law

- In the play, Oedipus unknowingly enforces justice on himself.
- Compare this to Islamic principles of justice, such as those found in *Shari'ah* law and the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
- Discuss the concept of self-judgment vs. divine judgment in both traditions.

### Application in Teaching

- Assign essays analyzing Oedipus' leadership through the lens of Islamic ethics.
- Conduct debates on whether a ruler should be held accountable for unintended consequences.

### 3.1.3. The Play as a Philosophical Inquiry

#### a. Knowledge, Truth, and Human Limits

- *King Oedipus* raises fundamental questions about the limits of human knowledge.
- The play reflects Socratic and Aristotelian ideas about wisdom and self-awareness ("*Know thyself*").
- In Islam, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Farabi also discuss the pursuit of knowledge and its ethical dimensions.

#### b. The Islamic View on Knowledge vs. Greek Philosophy

- Islam values knowledge (*'ilm*) but distinguishes between divine wisdom (*hikmah*) and human reasoning.
- *The Qur'an* states:

And they ask you about the soul. Say, 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord, and mankind has not been given of knowledge except a little.' (Qur'an 17:85)

- Oedipus' downfall can be contrasted with the Islamic approach to humility in knowledge.

#### c. Free Will and Moral Responsibility

- Philosophical debates on free will vs. determinism exist in both Greek and Islamic traditions.
- *King Oedipus* suggests a fatalistic worldview, while Islam emphasizes moral choice within divine decree.
- Compare Oedipus' fate with Islamic stories, such as:
  - **Prophet Adam and His Mistake** (Qur'an 2:36) – Emphasizing repentance instead of fatalism.
  - **Pharaoh's Arrogance (Fir'awn)** – A ruler who defies divine justice.

### *Application in Teaching*

- Assign readings from Islamic philosophers like Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Al-Farabi, who engaged with Greek thought.
- Discuss how knowledge in *King Oedipus* relates to modern ethical dilemmas (e.g., AI, bioethics, governance).

#### *3.1.4. Using Comparative Literature to Contextualize the Play*

##### *a. Tragedy in Other Civilizations*

- Compare *King Oedipus* with Persian, Indian, and Arabic literature.
- Examples:
  - **Persian Tragic Poetry (Attar's *Conference of the Birds*)** – Spiritual suffering as a path to enlightenment.
  - **The Mahabharata (India)** – Another text where fate plays a strong role.
  - **The Fall of Granada (Islamic Spain)** – A historical tragedy with literary reflections.

##### **b. Comparing Greek Drama with Islamic Storytelling**

Aspect	Greek Tragedy (King Oedipus)	Islamic Storytelling (Qasas in Qur'an)
<i>Role of Fate</i>	Deterministic, unavoidable.	Divine decree allows human agency.
<i>Justice</i>	Gods punish humans arbitrarily.	Allah's justice is based on wisdom.
<i>Character Arc</i>	No redemption for Oedipus.	Islamic figures can repent and reform.
<i>Role of Prophecy</i>	Fatalistic prophecy dominates.	Prophets guide people toward righteousness.

### *Application in Teaching*

- Encourage students to rewrite a scene of *King Oedipus* from an Islamic perspective.
- Assign projects on tragedy across different cultures.

#### *3.1.5. Practical Teaching Strategies for Contextualizing King Oedipus*

##### *a. Use Critical Thinking Exercises*

- Example Question: "If Oedipus had lived in an Islamic society, how might his story have been different?"
- Encourage comparative analysis instead of memorization.

##### *b. Integrate Islamic and Greek Philosophy*

- Assign readings from Plato, Aristotle, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd to show how ideas evolved across civilizations.

##### *c. Frame Discussions Around Ethics and Leadership*

- Discuss leadership failures and accountability in a way that is relevant to contemporary society.

#### d. Encourage Respectful Theological Comparisons

- Instead of dismissing Greek beliefs as "wrong," frame them as a historical worldview that influenced later thought
- Introduce early Islamic scholars who studied Greek texts (e.g., Al-Kindi, Ibn Sina)

By contextualizing *King Oedipus* as a literary and philosophical text rather than a religious or moral authority, educators can help students:

- i. Engage with classical literature without conflict with their faith.
- ii. Develop critical thinking skills by comparing Greek and Islamic worldviews.
- iii. Explore leadership, ethics, and justice through a comparative lens.
- iv. Appreciate the historical influence of Greek thought on Islamic scholarship.

### 3.2. Encouraging Comparative Analysis

By comparing Greek and Islamic worldviews, students can engage critically with the text without compromising their faith. Topics for comparison include:

- i. Prophecy in Greek and Islamic traditions
- ii. Leadership and accountability in Oedipus vs. Islamic rulers
- iii. Fate, free will, and moral responsibility

Encouraging comparative analysis when teaching *King Oedipus* at an Islamic university helps students critically engage with the text while contextualizing its themes within an Islamic intellectual and ethical framework. This method allows students to understand the differences and similarities between Greek tragedy and Islamic thought, particularly in areas such as fate, justice, leadership, and divine intervention. Comparative analysis also fosters deeper appreciation of how different civilizations have explored universal questions about human nature and morality.

#### 3.2.1. Why Comparative Analysis is Important

- i. **Promotes Critical Thinking** – Helps students evaluate different worldviews rather than passively accepting one perspective.
- ii. **Bridges Cultural and Intellectual Traditions** – Demonstrates how Greek and Islamic traditions engaged with similar philosophical and ethical questions.
- iii. **Encourages Interdisciplinary Learning** – Connects literature, philosophy, theology, and ethics.
- iv. **Prepares Students for Global Discourse** – Equips them with analytical skills needed for cross-cultural academic and professional discussions.

To encourage effective comparative analysis, educators can focus on key themes that appear in both *King Oedipus* and Islamic teachings.

#### 3.2.2. Comparative Themes in *King Oedipus* and Islam

##### a. Fate vs. Free Will

- *King Oedipus*: Greek tragedy portrays fate (*moira*) as absolute and unchangeable. No matter what Oedipus does, he is doomed to fulfill the prophecy.
- Islamic Perspective: Islam teaches *qadar* (divine decree), but emphasizes human free will and accountability. *The Qur'an* states:

Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Qur'an 13:11)

*Comparative Analysis Approach:*

- Assign a discussion or essay on: "*How does the concept of fate in King Oedipus compare to the Islamic understanding of qadar?*"
- Encourage students to analyse stories from Islamic tradition that discuss divine decree and human agency (e.g., Prophet Adam, Prophet Musa).

*b. Leadership and Moral Responsibility*

- *King Oedipus*: Oedipus is a leader who seeks justice, but his downfall results from ignorance and arrogance.
- Islamic Perspective: Leadership is a trust (amanah) in Islam, and leaders are accountable before Allah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The leader of a people is their servant". (*Sunan Abu Dawood*, 2858)

*Comparative Analysis Approach:*

- Compare Oedipus with Islamic rulers like Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA), known for his justice and humility.
- Debate: "*Should a ruler be held accountable for unintended consequences of their decisions?*"

*c. Divine Justice and Human Suffering*

- *King Oedipus*: The gods appear indifferent, allowing innocent people to suffer due to fate.
- Islamic Perspective: Islam teaches divine justice ('*adl*), where suffering has purpose—as a test, purification, or means of elevation.

And We will surely test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, and lives, but give glad tidings to the patient. (Qur'an 2:155)

*Comparative Analysis Approach:*

- Compare Oedipus' suffering with Prophet Ayyub (Job), who endured hardship with patience and faith.
- Discuss: "*Does suffering in King Oedipus and Islamic teachings have different meanings?*"

*d. The Role of Prophecy*

- *King Oedipus*: The Oracle of Delphi predicts Oedipus' fate, and prophecies are inescapable.
- Islamic Perspective: In Islam, prophecy (*nubuwwah*) is meant as guidance rather than inevitable doom.

And We sent not the messengers except as bringers of good tidings and warners. (Qur'an 6:48)

*Comparative Analysis Approach:*

- Compare Greek oracles with Islamic prophets—e.g., Prophet Yunus (Jonah), who received a warning prophecy but was able to repent and change his destiny.
- Ask students: "*How do prophecies function differently in Greek mythology and Islamic teachings?*"

*e. Self-Punishment vs. Repentance*

- *King Oedipus*: Oedipus blinds himself as a form of atonement for his sins.
- Islamic Perspective: Islam encourages repentance (*tawba*) and seeking forgiveness, rather than self-inflicted suffering.

Say, O My servants who have transgressed against themselves: Do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. (Qur'an 39:53)

*Comparative Analysis Approach:*

- Compare Oedipus' self-punishment with Islamic repentance stories, such as Prophet Adam and Prophet Yunus, who sought Allah's mercy.
- Discussion question: "*Why does King Oedipus lack the concept of redemption, whereas Islam emphasizes it?*"

### 3.2.3. Case Studies for Comparative Analysis

*Case Study 1: Prophet Musa (Moses) vs. Oedipus*

- Similarities: Both Oedipus and Prophet Musa were given prophecies about their fate.
- Differences: Prophet Musa actively challenged oppression and changed history, whereas Oedipus was powerless to escape fate.
- Discussion: "*How does leadership in King Oedipus compare to that of Prophet Musa?*"

*Case Study 2: Pharaoh (Fir'awn) vs. Oedipus*

- Both are powerful rulers who experience downfall.
- Pharaoh's downfall is due to arrogance and deliberate oppression, while Oedipus' downfall is unintentional.
- Discussion: "*What role does free will play in Pharaoh's story that is absent in Oedipus' fate?*"

*Case Study 3: The Story of Prophet Lut (Lot)*

A relevant Qur'anic comparison to *King Oedipus* is the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) and the people of Sodom, who engaged in various forms of sexual immorality, including incest. The Qur'an describes how:

- The people of Sodom were punished for violating divine moral laws.
- Prophet Lut condemned their actions and called them to repentance.
- Unlike Oedipus, who is condemned by fate, the people of Sodom were punished due to their deliberate disobedience.

This story provides an Islamic framework for discussing the consequences of immorality, reinforcing that:

- Divine law forbids incest as unnatural and harmful.
- Unlike Greek fatalism, Islam allows for repentance and moral reform.
- Societies that normalize immoral behavior face consequences.

*Case Study 4: The Story of Prophet Yunus (Jonah)*

A useful Qur'anic comparison to Oedipus' despair is the story of Prophet Yunus (Jonah):

- Similarities:
  - Both Oedipus and Yunus experience extreme despair.
  - Both feel overwhelmed by their situations and initially attempt to escape.
- Key Differences:
  - Instead of harming himself, Yunus repents sincerely after being swallowed by the whale.
  - Allah forgives him and grants him a new purpose.
  - Unlike the Greek tragic model, which offers no escape from suffering, Islam encourages believers to return to Allah for mercy.

This comparison can help students understand that while despair is natural, the Islamic response is faith and perseverance rather than self-destruction.

#### *Case Study 5: The Story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Idol Worship*

A strong Islamic parallel to Greek mythology's polytheism is the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham):

- Challenge to Polytheism: Ibrahim, upon realizing the falsehood of idol worship, famously destroyed the idols of his people.
- Divine Revelation vs. Oracles: Unlike the vague and cryptic pronouncements of the Oracle of Delphi, divine revelation in Islam is clear and meant for moral guidance.
- Human Accountability: Ibrahim actively sought the truth and was rewarded, whereas Oedipus was doomed from birth despite his efforts.

This comparison allows students to critically examine why Islam rejects polytheism and emphasizes a just and merciful God.

### **3.2.4. Teaching Strategies for Comparative Analysis**

#### *a. Thematic Comparative Essays*

- Assign topics like:
  - *"Compare the role of fate in King Oedipus and the Islamic concept of qadar."*
  - *"Leadership in King Oedipus vs. Islamic history: What makes a just ruler?"*

#### *b. Structured Debates*

- Organize debates where students argue whether *King Oedipus* aligns or conflicts with Islamic thought.
- Sample debate topic: *"Was Oedipus responsible for his downfall, or was he a victim of fate?"*

#### *c. Literature and History Pairing*

- Pair readings from Greek tragedy and Islamic historical texts to show how civilizations responded to similar questions.

#### *d. Creative Rewriting Assignments*

- Ask students to rewrite a scene from *King Oedipus* from an Islamic perspective, showing how it would change.

### e. *Comparative Mind Maps*

- Have students create visual mind maps comparing themes from *King Oedipus* and Islamic stories.

#### 3.2.5. *Why Comparative Analysis Matters*

By encouraging comparative analysis, educators at Islamic universities can help students:

- i. **Appreciate Classical Literature** – Without compromising their cultural or religious values.
- ii. **Develop Critical Thinking** – By analysing different worldviews rather than rejecting them outright.
- iii. **Bridge Islamic and Western Thought** – Recognizing how different civilizations approached universal human dilemmas.
- iv. **Enhance Cross-Cultural Literacy** – Preparing students for engagement in a global academic and professional environment.

Instead of seeing *King Oedipus* as a challenge to Islamic teachings, it can be used as a tool for intellectual growth, helping students explore justice, fate, leadership, and human responsibility from multiple perspectives.

### 3.3. Selective Content Modification

In contexts where certain themes are considered inappropriate, educators may focus on elements that align with Islamic ethical discussions, such as:

- i. Oedipus' search for truth as an intellectual virtue.
- ii. The role of leadership and governance in avoiding moral corruption.

Teaching *King Oedipus* at an Islamic university can be challenging due to its themes of incest, suicide, polytheism, and fatalism, which may conflict with Islamic values. However, instead of removing the text entirely, selective content modification offers a balanced approach—allowing students to study the play while ensuring that sensitive themes are addressed with appropriate ethical and theological considerations.

#### 3.3.1. *Why Modify the Content?*

Selective modification ensures that:

- i. **Islamic Moral Standards Are Respected** – Avoiding explicit discussion of themes that contradict Islamic teachings.
- ii. **Literary Value Is Preserved** – Keeping key elements of the play intact for academic study.
- iii. **Students Engage with Global Literature** – Encouraging exposure to world classics without theological discomfort.
- iv. **Comparative Analysis is Encouraged** – Helping students critically examine Greek and Islamic worldviews.

#### 3.3.2. Key Areas for Content Modification

##### a. *Addressing Incest: Reframing the Discussion*

One of the most sensitive aspects of *King Oedipus* is the revelation that Oedipus unknowingly married his mother and fathered children with her. In Islamic ethics, incest (*zina al-mahram*) is strictly prohibited

(Qur'an 4:23). While the play does not glorify incest, even the indirect discussion of such a topic can be culturally and religiously sensitive.

### *Modification Approach*

#### *Focus on Moral Blindness Instead of the Act Itself:*

- Instead of discussing incest directly, frame the discussion around Oedipus' ignorance and the consequences of human error.
- Encourage comparative analysis: How does Islamic justice differ from Greek tragic justice?
- Example discussion question: "*How does Oedipus' lack of self-awareness compare to moral responsibility in Islam?*"

#### *Compare with the Islamic Concept of Prohibited Relationships:*

- Introduce Islamic legal rulings on family purity and why they exist.
- Draw parallels to Qur'anic narratives, such as Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), who resisted temptation and upheld moral integrity.

### *b. Suicide and Self-Harm: Focusing on Alternative Ethical Responses*

At the climax of *King Oedipus*, Jocasta commits suicide, and Oedipus blinds himself in despair. In Islam, suicide is strictly forbidden:

And do not kill yourselves. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful. (Qur'an 4:29)

Whoever kills himself with something in this world will be punished with it on the Day of Judgment. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 5778)

### *Modification Approach*

#### *Frame Oedipus' Blinding as Symbolic Rather than Literal:*

- Instead of treating self-harm as an acceptable reaction, emphasize intellectual blindness vs. physical blindness.
- Discuss how Oedipus "blinds himself to truth" before the physical act.
- Example discussion question: "*What does blindness symbolize in both Greek and Islamic traditions?*"

#### *Compare with Islamic Teachings on Patience (Sabr):*

- In Islam, suffering is seen as a test, and patience and repentance are preferred over self-harm.
- Case Study Comparison: *Oedipus vs. Prophet Ayyub (Job)* – Both endure suffering, but Ayyub maintains faith and patience, leading to divine mercy.
- Discussion: "*How does Oedipus' response to suffering differ from the Islamic view of patience (sabr)?*"

*c. The Role of Greek Polytheism: Focusing on Myth as Literature, Not Theology*

*King Oedipus* is deeply rooted in Greek mythology, particularly the role of Apollo and the Oracle of Delphi. This contrasts with Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), which strictly rejects the belief in multiple deities.

And your god is one God. There is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. (Qur'an 2:163)

*Modification Approach*

*Present Greek Gods as Historical Beliefs, Not Truth:*

- Instead of treating Apollo as a real divine force, emphasize how different cultures interpret divinity.
- Compare Greek oracles with Islamic prophethood, emphasizing guidance vs. fatalism.
- Example discussion question: "*How do oracles in Greek mythology compare to divine revelation (wahy) in Islam?*"

*Compare Pre-Islamic Arabia's Idolatry with Greek Polytheism:*

- Just as early Arabs worshipped multiple gods (*jahiliyyah* period), ancient Greeks had mythological deities.
- Discussion: "*How did Islam replace polytheistic traditions with monotheism, and what can we learn from that history?*"

*d. Fatalism vs. Divine Justice: Emphasizing Moral Accountability*

Greek tragedy assumes that fate (*moira*) is inescapable, and humans are doomed regardless of their choices. Islam, however, balances divine decree (*qadar*) with human accountability:

Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Qur'an 13:11)

*Modification Approach*

*Frame Oedipus' Fate as a Test, Not an Unjust Punishment:*

- Instead of focusing on Oedipus being "doomed," discuss how moral choices matter in different cultures.
- Compare Oedipus' fate with Prophet Yunus (Jonah), who changed his destiny through repentance and faith.

*Encourage Theological Debates on Fate:*

- Debate: "*Is Oedipus truly powerless, or does he have some free will?*"
- Compare Greek fatalism with Islamic theology (Ash'arite, Mu'tazilite views on free will).

### 3.3.3. Practical Strategies for Content Modification

#### a. Selective Reading Approach

- Focus on philosophical and leadership aspects instead of controversial themes.
- Assign edited versions of the text that omit unnecessary graphic descriptions.

#### b. Guided Discussions Instead of Direct Readings

- Instead of directly reading problematic scenes, summarize them and discuss their implications in different cultures.

#### c. Use Alternative Classical Texts for Comparison

- Assign complementary readings from Islamic philosophy (Ibn Rushd, Al-Farabi) alongside *King Oedipus*.

#### d. Integrate Islamic Ethical Perspectives

- Create comparative case studies with Islamic narratives that explore fate, suffering, and repentance.

### 3.3.4. Balancing Literary Value with Cultural Sensitivity

Selective content modification allows Islamic universities to retain the intellectual value of *King Oedipus* while respecting Islamic beliefs and moral values. By carefully reframing themes and encouraging comparative analysis, educators can help students:

- i. Engage with world literature critically without discomfort
- ii. Understand different worldviews through an ethical lens
- iii. Develop analytical and philosophical reasoning skills
- iv. Appreciate the interplay between culture, literature, and religion.

### 3.4. Integrating Islamic Literary Perspectives

Islamic literature also explores themes of fate, tragedy, and human struggle. Instructors may draw parallels with:

- i. The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) and divine justice.
- ii. Islamic philosophical discussions on predestination and free will (e.g., Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd).

Integrating Islamic literary perspectives when teaching *King Oedipus* at an Islamic university helps bridge classical Western literature with Islamic philosophical and literary traditions. This approach enables students to engage with Sophocles' play while grounding their analysis in Islamic ethics, theology, and storytelling traditions.

This section explores how educators can contextualize *King Oedipus* within Islamic literature, philosophy, and historical narratives to create a balanced and culturally sensitive curriculum.

#### 3.4.1. Why Integrate Islamic Literary Perspectives?

- i. Bridges Intellectual Traditions – Demonstrates the historical dialogue between Islamic and Greek thought.
- ii. Encourages Critical Engagement – Allows students to compare and contrast worldviews without outright rejection.

- iii. Aligns Literary Analysis with Islamic Ethics – Uses Islamic moral and philosophical frameworks to evaluate the themes of *King Oedipus*.
- iv. Enhances Cultural and Religious Sensitivity – Ensures that students can study classical texts without discomfort.

To integrate Islamic literary perspectives effectively, educators should highlight key themes in *King Oedipus* and compare them with Islamic literature and philosophy.

### 3.4.2. Comparing *King Oedipus* with Islamic Literature

#### a. Fate vs. Free Will: *Oedipus* and *Qadar* (Divine Decree)

- i. *King Oedipus*: Fate (*moira*) is unchangeable and absolute; Oedipus cannot escape his tragic destiny.
- ii. Islamic Perspective: *Qadar* (divine decree) is balanced with human free will; Allah knows the future but allows humans to make choices.

#### Islamic Literary Comparison:

- i. Prophet Adam's Story (Qur'an 2:36) – Adam was destined to leave Paradise, yet he repented and was forgiven (unlike Oedipus, who is doomed).
- ii. Prophet Musa and Pharaoh (Qur'an 28:3-42) – Pharaoh defies divine warnings but is held accountable for his choices.

#### Discussion Question:

*If Oedipus had been in an Islamic framework, could he have changed his fate through repentance?*

#### b. Tragic Leadership: *Oedipus* and Islamic Rulers

- *King Oedipus*: A well-intentioned leader who suffers due to ignorance and pride.
- Islamic Perspective: Leadership in Islam is a trust (*amanah*), and leaders are accountable before Allah.

#### Islamic Literary Comparison:

- Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) – Known for humility and justice, contrasts with Oedipus' pride and downfall.
- Salahuddin Al-Ayyubi (Saladin) – A leader who exercised patience and wisdom instead of rash decisions.
- Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* – Discusses the rise and fall of leaders and how arrogance leads to their downfall.

#### Discussion Question:

*How does Oedipus' leadership compare to Islamic ideals of governance and accountability?*

#### c. Suffering and Redemption: *Oedipus* vs. Islamic Patience (*Sabr*)

- *King Oedipus*: Suffering is seen as punishment from the gods; there is no redemption.
- Islamic Perspective: Suffering is a test (*ibtila'*) that can lead to spiritual growth and purification.

*Islamic Literary Comparison:*

- Prophet Ayyub (Job) (Qur'an 38:41-44) – Endured extreme suffering but remained patient and was rewarded.
- Rumi's Poetry – Emphasizes that suffering refines the soul, unlike Oedipus' despair.
- Sufi Literature (Attar's *Conference of the Birds*) – Tragedy is seen as a path to enlightenment, whereas Oedipus sees it as a dead end.

*Discussion Question:*

*Does suffering always lead to destruction, as in King Oedipus, or can it lead to spiritual growth, as in Islam?*

*d. The Role of Prophecy: Greek Oracles vs. Islamic Revelation*

- *King Oedipus*: The Oracle of Delphi gives cryptic and inescapable prophecies.
- Islamic Perspective: Prophets in Islam receive revelation (*wahy*) as guidance, not as a curse.

*Islamic Literary Comparison:*

- Prophet Yunus (Jonah) (Qur'an 37:139-148) – Receives a divine warning but repents and changes his fate.
- Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) (Qur'an 12:4-101) – His dream prophecy unfolds, but through faith and moral choices.
- Al-Ghazali's *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* – Argues that divine knowledge does not contradict human choice.

*Discussion Question:*

*How do prophecies in King Oedipus differ from Islamic revelation? Can humans alter their destinies in Islam?*

**3.4.3. Teaching Strategies for Integrating Islamic Literary Perspectives***a. Parallel Text Analysis*

- Assign *King Oedipus* alongside Islamic narratives (e.g., Prophet Yusuf's story) to compare themes of fate, suffering, and leadership.

*b. Thematic Essays*

- Sample topics:
  - "Fate vs. Free Will: Oedipus and the Islamic Concept of Qadar."
  - "How Should a Ruler Handle Crisis? Lessons from King Oedipus and Islamic History."

*c. Structured Debates*

- Debate topics:
  - "Was Oedipus responsible for his downfall, or was it fate?"
  - "Does suffering always lead to destruction, or can it be redemptive?"

#### d. Creative Rewriting

- Ask students to rewrite a scene from *King Oedipus* with an Islamic moral resolution (e.g., Oedipus repents instead of blinding himself).

#### e. Mind Maps and Visual Comparisons

- Have students create mind maps comparing Greek tragedy with Islamic storytelling.

Integrating Islamic literary perspectives into the study of *King Oedipus* allows students to:

- Engage with classical literature critically while staying rooted in Islamic ethical values.
- Compare different worldviews on fate, justice, leadership, and suffering.
- Appreciate how Islamic scholars interacted with Greek thought.
- Develop a balanced intellectual approach, respecting both Western and Islamic traditions.

### 4. Institutional and Policy Considerations

Islamic universities often have strict regulations regarding curricular content. While some institutions may allow for academic freedom, others may require content approval or modification.

#### Recommendations:

- Engage with university administrators to ensure curricular compliance.
- Offer interdisciplinary courses where *King Oedipus* is studied alongside Islamic perspectives on fate and morality.
- Consider alternative classical texts that align more closely with Islamic values.

### 5. Conclusion

Teaching *King Oedipus* in an Islamic university requires careful navigation of religious sensitivities, ethical considerations, and literary analysis. By framing the play within a broader philosophical and cultural discussion, educators can provide students with an opportunity to engage with world literature while respecting Islamic principles. Through comparative analysis, selective content modification, and contextual discussions, *King Oedipus* can serve as a valuable educational tool without conflicting with Islamic teachings.

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