



University of Tehran Press

Classical and Contemporary Islamic Studies (CCIS)

Online ISSN: 3060-7337

Home Page: <https://jcis.ut.ac.ir>

Revisiting the Concept of Nafs Wahidah in the Qur'an: A Critique of Amina Wadud's View Based on Islamic Commentaries

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ARTICLE INFO

Article type:
Research Article

Article History:
Received: 01 April 2025
Revised: 05 August 2025
Accepted: 19 August 2025
Published Online: 23 September 2025

Keywords:
Nafs Wahidah,
Human creation,
Amina Wadud,
Interpretive methodology,
Islamic feminism.

ABSTRACT

The concept of *nafs wāhida* (the single soul), mentioned in Qur'an 4:1 and 7:189, has long been a focal point in Islamic exegesis and has significantly influenced gender discourse in Islamic thought. Amina Wadud, a prominent figure in Islamic feminism, emphasizes this concept to argue for the fundamental equality of men and women, challenging traditional views that consider women's creation as derivative of men. However, her critique primarily targets *Isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives, overlooking Shi'i interpretations as well as other exegetical traditions across the Islamic world. This study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach to criticize Wadud's methodology and compares Sunni and Shi'i interpretations of *nafs wāhida*. The findings reveal that, although Wadud offers a justice-oriented and critical reading of traditional perspectives, her analysis remains incomplete due to insufficient attention to the diversity within Islamic exegesis. Notably, the majority of Shi'i commentators, in addition to some Sunni commentators, emphasize the shared origin of humanity and gender equality, aligning with Wadud's critique of *Isrā'īlīyyāt*-influenced narratives. By presenting a broader analysis of Islamic commentaries and critically assessing Wadud's approach, this paper provides a more comprehensive understanding of *nafs wāhida* and stresses that gender-focused interpretations of religious texts risk reductionism if they ignore the interpretive plurality within the Islamic tradition.

Cite this article: Shirmahi, N. & Hadian Rasanani, E. (2026). Revisiting the Concept of Nafs Wahidah in the Qur'an: A Critique of Amina Wadud's View Based on Islamic Commentaries. *Classical and Contemporary Islamic Studies (CCIS)*, 8 (1), 63-72. <http://doi.org/10.22059/jcis.2025.392779.1416>



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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jcis.2025.392779.1416>

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

1. Introduction

The concept of *nafs wāḥidah* (the single soul), as mentioned in Qur'anic verse 4:1 (*Sūrat al-Nisā'*) and verse 7:189 (*Sūrat al-A'raf*), is a central theme in Islamic theology and exegetical discussions concerning the creation of humanity. This concept, which alludes to the shared origin of all human beings, has significantly influenced debates about the status of men and women in Islamic thought. Over the course of history, numerous interpretations have been offered regarding this notion.

In numerous Sunni commentaries, *nafs wāḥidah* is interpreted as referring to Adam (peace be upon him), and his “spouse” (*zawj*), i.e., Eve (PBUH), is considered a derivative being created from him (Baghawī, 1999, Vol. 1; Bayḍāwī, 1997, Vol. 2; Ibn Kathīr, 1998, Vol. 2; Qurtubī, 1985, Vol. 5; Ṭabarānī, 2008, Vol. 2; Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 6; Tha'labī, 2001, Vol. 3; Zamakhsharī, 1987, Vol. 1). Some of these interpretations, influenced by *Isrā'īlīyyāt* and Judeo-Christian traditions, view women as subordinate and secondary to men—an outlook that has had far-reaching implications for jurisprudential, social, and legal perspectives in the Islamic world.

With the emergence of new interpretive approaches, including Islamic feminism, fresh readings of this concept have been introduced.

Amina Wadud, one of the most prominent figures in Islamic feminism, has analyzed the concept of *nafs wāḥidah* to argue for the inherent equality of men and women, challenging traditional interpretations that portray the creation of women as dependent upon man. She asserts that the Qur'an, contrary to patriarchal exegeses, presents men and women as originating from a common source, without any intrinsic precedence or hierarchy in creation.

However, Wadud's critiques are primarily grounded in Sunni exegesis and do not sufficiently engage with Shi'i interpretations, which in some cases offer an alternative understanding of this concept.

This issue underscores the necessity of a comparative examination of Wadud's perspective along with the interpretations of both major Islamic traditions—Shi'i and Sunni.

Can Wadud's analysis, without engaging Shi'i exegesis, offer a comprehensive portrayal of the Islamic viewpoint on the creation of men and women? What interpretations have Shi'i and Sunni exegetes presented regarding *nafs wāḥidah*, and what differences exist between them concerning the notion of gender equality? Finally, how can coherence be established between traditional and modernist interpretations of this foundational concept?

This study, adopting a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach, aims to:

- Examine and critique Amina Wadud's methodology in reinterpreting the concept of *nafs wāḥidah*;
- Analyze Shi'i exegetical perspectives, which have received limited attention in Wadud's work;
- Compare various exegetical viewpoints, highlighting their respective strengths and weaknesses;
- Provide an academic framework for exploring the role of gender-oriented interpretations in Qur'anic studies.

2. Literature Review

The issue of human creation from *nafs wāḥidah* has long attracted the attention of exegetes, Islamic thinkers, and scholars in the field of gender studies, and has been addressed in exegetical, philosophical, and sociological works. Broadly speaking, previous research in this area can be categorized into two main areas:

a) Examination of Traditional Interpretations of *Nafs Wahidah*

Many Islamic commentaries interpret the concept of *nafs wāḥidah* as referring to Prophet Adam (PBUH), and understand his “spouse” (*zawj*) to be Eve (PBUH). This traditional approach is found in the works of exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṭabarānī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Baghawī, al-Tha'labī, al-Qurtubī, al-Bayḍāwī, and al-Zamakhsharī. Some of these interpretations, particularly within Sunni realm, were influenced by *Isrā'īlīyyāt* (Judeo-Christian traditions), adopting the narrative that women were created from Adam's rib (Baghawī, 1999, Vol. 1; Bayḍāwī, 1997, Vol. 2; Ibn Kathīr, 1998, Vol. 2; Qurtubī, 1985, Vol. 5; Ṭabarānī, 2008, Vol. 2; Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 6; Tha'labī, 2001, Vol. 3; Zamakhsharī, 1987, Vol. 1).

These interpretations, as well as others portraying women as secondary to men, have had a profound impact on jurisprudential, social, and legal perspectives in Islamic societies.

In contrast, some Shi'i exegetes, such as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i in *al-Mīzān*, have critiqued this view, emphasizing the unity of the origin of human creation (Ṭabāṭabā'i, 1973, Vol. 4). These exegetes, through linguistic analysis and a more precise examination of the contextual flow (*siyāq*) of the verses, have sought to present an interpretation that avoids reliance on *Isrā'īlīyyāt*, aligning with both reason and transmitted sources (*'aql* and *naql*).

b) Contemporary Analyses

In recent years, some scholars—adopting modern interpretive approaches—have sought to reconsider traditional readings of the Qur'anic verses concerning human creation. For example:

1. Amina Wadud, in her works, such as *Qur'an and Woman* (Wadud, 1999), critiques traditional exegesis and maintains that the Qur'an presents men and women as being created from a common origin. She argues that patriarchal interpretations of these verses stem from the cultural presuppositions of the exegetes.
2. Studies such as *Explaining the Relation Between Nafs Wahidah and Adam* (Rūḥānī, 2020) and *The Impact of Gender on Qur'anic Exegesis* (Shams & Abbāsī-Moqaddam, 2022) have shown that the gendered perspectives of exegetes have had a direct influence on their interpretations of these verses.
3. Other research, such as *Reflections on the Application of Historical Criticism in the Study of Gender in the Qur'an* (Tofiqī, 2022), also emphasizes the necessity of reevaluating traditional commentaries and developing new interpretive approaches.

While previous studies have primarily focused on either traditional exegetical perspectives or feminist interpretations in isolation, the present research adopts a comparative approach to offer a comprehensive analysis of the views of Shi'i and Sunni exegetes as well as those of Amina Wadud. In addition to critiquing Wadud's methodology, this study explores overlooked exegetical perspectives, aiming to enrich the discourse by incorporating a broader range of interpretive data. Employing this approach, the study seeks to present a more holistic understanding of the concept of *nafs wāḥidah* and the position of men and women in the Qur'an.

3. Amina Wadud and Her Academic Background

Amina Wadud (b. 1952) is a well-known figure in the field of *Islamic feminism* who has sought to offer a gender-egalitarian reading of the Qur'an, distinct from conventional interpretations. She completed her higher education in Islamic Studies in the United States and received her PhD from the University of Michigan. Wadud has devoted much of her academic and research work to the intersection of gender and religion. In her writings—most notably her book, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Wadud, 1999), and her article, *Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an* (Wadud, 2021)—she has critically engaged with traditional Qur'anic interpretations.

Wadud's analysis is grounded in the presupposition that dominant exegetical traditions have been shaped by patriarchal structures, and that the gender justice embedded in the Qur'anic text has been historically neglected. Emphasizing the need to reread the Qur'an through the lens of women's lived experiences, she argues that women must enter the field of interpretation as authoritative agents and epistemic contributors. Her approach is clearly influenced by the discourse of contemporary feminism.

With this perspective, Amina Wadud, in her book *Qur'an and Woman*, seeks to reinterpret key concepts such as creation, the roles and rights of women, as well as issues like polygyny and inheritance. She emphasizes the equality of men and women in both the origin of creation and in moral responsibility. In her article, she also explicitly states that the traditional understanding of the Qur'an has deprived women of the status of the complete human beings and independent moral agents, while positioning men as the standard of humanity and perfection (Wadud, 2021).

Nevertheless, Wadud's views have faced serious criticism for disregarding established exegetical foundations and overlooking the rich legacy of Islamic tafsir, particularly within the Shi'i tradition. Rather than relying on sound interpretive principles, she draws primarily on Western epistemological models and contemporary feminist frameworks. For this reason, some analysts argue that Wadud's

efforts to redefine Qur'anic concepts are driven more by her feminist presuppositions than by rigorous Qur'anic or scholarly methodology.

By prioritizing "lived experience" over the text (*naṣṣ*) and giving precedence to "context" over scripture in her analyses, Wadud establishes a methodological approach that is highly contested. It stands in tension with the accepted principles of Qur'anic interpretation.

Overall, while Wadud is regarded in Western academic and feminist circles as a pioneer of gender-based Qur'anic interpretation, her perspectives have drawn strong critiques for their ideological slant and for failing to engage meaningfully with the interpretive depth of Islamic exegetical traditions. Her approach calls for a fundamental reassessment through the lens of Qur'anic epistemology and hermeneutics.

4. Tawḥīdic Theology and Gender Justice in Amina Wadud's Thought

Amina Wadud bases one of the core foundations of her interpretive approach on the principle of *tawḥīd* (divine unity). She argues that the oneness of God is not only the cornerstone of Muslim belief but also the foundation of Islam's ethical and legal system. In her view, *tawḥīd* is not merely the acknowledgment of a single God; it also implies that all human beings, regardless of gender, are inherently equal in dignity and status. Based on this understanding, Wadud asserts that any privileging of men over women, whether in religious interpretation or in legal and social structures, contradicts the essence of *tawḥīd* and reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of its true meaning (Wadud, 1999, 2021).

According to Wadud, patriarchal structures and male-centered interpretations of the Qur'an have historically undermined the status of women in the Muslim community by neglecting this foundational principle of divine unity. She contends that many Islamic rulings and legal norms throughout history were shaped not by the spirit of the Qur'an, rather by patriarchal cultures and mythological beliefs. In contrast, the Qur'an, she argues, emphasizes the equality of all human beings and contains no gender-based hierarchy in creation or moral responsibility (Wadud, 1999).

Wadud argues that gender justice in Muslim societies can only be realized when the principle of *tawḥīd* is properly understood and applied. For her, *tawḥīd* is not limited to theological belief but also necessitates the establishment of justice in human relationships. She maintains that patriarchy not only contradicts justice but ultimately violates *tawḥīd* itself, as the domination of one group of human beings over another undermines the Qur'anic notion of equality in both creation and responsibility (Wadud, 2021).

Accordingly, Wadud calls for a fundamental reassessment of many traditional legal rulings and interpretations, asserting that without such reforms, claims to Islamic justice remain unfulfilled. In her view, the continued endorsement of laws or interpretations that justify gender inequality stands in direct opposition to the principle of *tawḥīd* and divine justice (Wadud, 1999).

In summary, *tawḥīd*-based theology in Wadud's thought serves as a theoretical framework for critiquing patriarchal Qur'anic interpretations. From this perspective, she advocates a rereading of sacred texts and a reform of traditional views on women in Islam. However, this approach is not without its challenges; applying a concept such as *tawḥīd* to all social and legal spheres, without considering the natural differences and distinct roles of men and women in the divine order, risks overlooking certain aspects of human creation and divine wisdom (Wadud, 1999, 2021).

5. Semantic Analysis of the Term "Nafs" in Language and the Qur'an

One of the central concepts Amina Wadud, focused on in her analysis, is the Qur'anic phrase *nafs wāḥidah* (the single soul), which she considers a foundation for establishing the intrinsic equality of men and women. Referring to the literal expression of this term, Wadud critiques traditional interpretations that portray women as secondary to men. She argues that, by using this concept, the Qur'an presents both men and women as originating from a single source, without any precedence or superiority in the order of creation.

5-1. Semantic Analysis of the Term *Nafs* in Lexicography

The Arabic term *nafs* possesses a broad and multilayered semantic field, with diverse applications across lexical and exegetical texts. Its meanings include spirit, soul, blood, eye, body, and even a small piece of leather (Azharī, 2000, Vol. 13; Ibn Manẓūr, 1993, Vol. 6; Jawharī Fārābī, 1987, Vol. 3;

Qurashī Banābī, 1992, Vol. 7). The term also refers to the air inhaled and exhaled from the lungs (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991, Vol. 1), and at times, it is used to denote the human being itself; al-Farāhīdī, for instance, considers *nafs* as indicative of human essence (Farāhīdī, 1988, Vol. 7).

In some lexicons, the term *nafs* is considered feminine and is used with meanings such as soul, the essence of the human being, and the core of one's existence. An example of this usage is found in the Qur'anic verse:

"خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ" ("He created you from a single soul") (*al-Nisā'* 4:1), where the word *nafs* appears in the feminine form, signifying the shared human essence (Fayūmī, 1977, Vol. 2).

According to some exegetes, *nafs* is a term in the Arabic language that encompasses meanings ranging from the spirit and life of a person to the entirety of one's being, with its specific meaning determined by the context (Āmulī, 2001, Vol. 8).

Similarly, in his lexicon, Dehkhodā defines *nafs* as life, spirit, and the sign of a person being alive, highlighting the broad usage of this term in expressing the essential reality of the human being (Dehkhodā, 1967, Vol. 48, p. 661).

5-2. The Qur'anic Concept and Function of "Nafs Wāḥidah"

Qur'anic studies indicate that the term *nafs* in the Qur'an encompasses a wide range of meanings and serves as a fundamental essence that shapes human identity. In various verses, *nafs* at times refers to the Divine Essence, at other times denotes the individual or collective identity of human beings, and elsewhere points to the primordial nature of humans, as well as to the intellect (‘*aql*), heart (*qalb*), and even the intermediate (*barzakhī*) state of human existence (Shākir, 2000).

In certain contexts, *nafs* carries a specific and technical meaning, referring to the spiritual and cognitive dimensions of the human being. It may simultaneously encompass the totality of human existence and, in other cases, be limited to aspects such as intellect, heart, and spiritual faculties (Jawharī Fārābī, 1987, Vol. 2). This diversity of usage reflects the Qur'an's comprehensive view of the human being, considering *nafs* as a central concept for explaining both the material and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

5-3. Occurrences of "Nafs Wāḥidah" in the Qur'an and Their Implications

The expression *nafs wāḥidah* appears in several Qur'anic verses, all of which emphasize the unity of the origin of human creation and the existential bond between men and women. The most significant of these verses are:

Sūrat al-Nisā' (4:1):

"يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا"

"O humankind! Be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate..."

This verse clearly emphasizes the unity of origin for both men and women, stating that both were created from a single soul.

Sūrat al-A'rāf (7:189):

"هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا"

"He is the One who created you from a single soul and made from it its mate..."

Beyond reiterating the shared origin, this verse also alludes to the complementary relationship between men and women and the tranquility individuals find in their spouse.

Sūrat al-Zumar (39:6):

"خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا"

"He created you from a single soul, then made from it its mate..." Here, too, the concept of *zawjiyyah* (pairing) and the shared essence of men and women in creation is presented as a sign of the Divine.

Based on these verses, it can be understood that the expression *nafs wāḥidah* in the Qur'an conveys a profound meaning of human unity and oneness, portraying men and women as originating from the same essential reality. This concept lays the groundwork for broader discussions on the status and dignity of men and women in Islamic teachings.

6. Amina Wadud's View on "Nafs Wahidah" and Gender Equality in the Qur'an

In *Qur'an and Woman*, Amina Wadud presents *nafs wāḥidah* as the Qur'anic basis for affirming the inherent equality of men and women. Referencing verses like Sūrat *al-Nisā'* (4:1), she asserts that men and women were both created from a single essence, without precedence or derivation. Wadud challenges traditional interpretations that identify Adam as the primary human and women as secondary, arguing that such views stem from patriarchal biases and cultural influences (Wadud, 1999).

In her rereading of verse 4:1, Wadud underscores that *nafs*, a grammatically feminine term, denotes a shared human essence rather than gender, and therefore, implies no superiority of men over women. She supports her view with Sūrat *al-A'raf* (7:189), emphasizing that any interpretation introducing hierarchy is external to the Qur'an and must be reexamined (Wadud, 1999, 2021).

Wadud critiques patriarchal exegesis and *Isrā'īliyyāt*, rejecting the story of women's creation from Adam's rib as a non-Qur'anic interpolation. She stresses that these Judeo-Christian narratives distort the Qur'an's message, which affirms gender equality through the expression *nafs wāḥidah* (Wadud, 1999).

She further rejects interpretations that blame Eve for the original sin, arguing that the Qur'an holds both Adam and his spouse equally accountable, thereby negating misogynistic readings (Wadud, 1999).

Wadud also challenges the interpretation of the preposition *min* in verse 4:1, suggesting that it indicates sameness in kind, not derivation. She highlights the Qur'anic use of *zawj* (spouse) in verses such as *al-Rūm* (30:21) to affirm mutuality and partnership between the sexes. Discriminatory readings, she contends, reflect cultural misreadings rather than the Qur'anic message (Wadud, 1999).

A core principle in Wadud's thought is moral equality based on *taqwā*, not gender. She cites Sūrat *al-Ḥujurāt* (49:13)—"Indeed, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you"—to argue that men and women stand equally before God. She reiterates that both Adam and Eve share responsibility for the original transgression, rejecting gendered blame (Wadud, 1999, 2021).

Wadud critiques the patriarchal underpinnings of Islamic legal interpretations, stating that they often lack direct Qur'anic justification and are shaped by male exegetes and cultural norms. She calls for reform based on the Qur'anic emphasis on justice and the actual experiences of Muslim women (Wadud, 1999).

Ultimately, she concludes that many gender roles are not Qur'an-based but are interpretative constructs. Therefore, she advocates for a reevaluation of traditional tafsīr to recover the Qur'an's egalitarian ethos (Wadud, 2021).

7. General Critique of Amina Wadud's Methodology and Her Focus on Sunni Tafsīr and Isrā'īliyyāt

A close examination of Amina Wadud's works, particularly her book, *Qur'an and Woman*, and her 2021 article, reveals that her methodological approach in critiquing traditional Qur'anic interpretations is primarily focused on Sunni exegesis and the analysis of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, the Judeo-Christian narrations that gradually found their way into some Sunni commentaries. These narrations have played a significant role in shaping patriarchal views of women in Islamic interpretive traditions (Wadud, 1999, 2021).

Relying on this subset of interpretations, Wadud concludes that patriarchal thinking dominates the entire Islamic exegetical tradition. However, a closer examination of exegetical sources, especially Shi'i commentaries, indicates that this conclusion is, to a large extent, the result of overlooking the rationalist and methodologically rigorous approaches found in Shi'i tafsīr. Many Shi'i exegetes, adopting a different methodology, have moved beyond the influence of such narrations and have sought to interpret the Qur'an by drawing directly from the text itself and by relying on rational principles.

For example, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in *al-Tibyān*, classifies the narrations about Eve being created from Adam's rib as *Isrā'īliyyāt*, arguing that such reports lack reliable chains of transmission within Islamic sources and are also irrational (Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 5). Similar critiques can be found in the works of other exegetes, such as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1973, vol. 4), Makārim Shīrāzī (1995, vol. 3), and numerous Shi'i commentators, including al-Qummī (1988, vol. 3) and Balāghī (n.d., vol. 2). Even among Sunni

exegetes, figures such as Fakhr al-Rāzī (1999, vol. 9) and al-Marāghī (n.d., vol. 4) offer methodical critiques of these narratives.

These examples demonstrate that, contrary to Wadud's assumption, the entire Islamic exegetical tradition has not been uniformly patriarchal. Rather, significant voices within both Shi'i and Sunni traditions have offered critical and rational readings that challenge such inherited interpretations.

Wadud, in her critique, also pays limited attention to the rationalist exegetical approaches within the Shi'i tradition and focuses predominantly on Sunni tafsīr as a whole. She tends to treat the exegetical tradition as a monolithic, patriarchal discourse, without distinguishing between different interpretive schools, which represents a significant methodological shortcoming.

While it is true that Wadud rightly critiques certain aspects of traditional interpretations, especially those found in Sunni exegesis, her extension of this critique to the entirety of the Islamic exegetical heritage overlooks key differences among interpretive traditions, particularly the Shi'i emphasis on reason (*'aql*) and critical scrutiny of narrations (*naql*). This lack of differentiation leads Wadud to present an oversimplified and homogenized image of the exegetical tradition—an image that does not accurately reflect the diversity and depth found in Islamic sources.

7-1. Critique of Wadud's View on *Nafs Wahidah* Based on Shi'i and Sunni Tafsīr

Amina Wadud argues that the Qur'anic phrase *nafs wāḥidah* supports gender equality and that traditional tafsīr often depicts women as derivative of men, due to patriarchal influences and *Isrā'īliyyāt* (Wadud, 1999, 2021). However, this article, through an analysis of major Sunni and Shi'i commentaries, challenges Wadud's generalization.

Among Sunni exegetes, Rashīd Riḍā offers a critical and scientifically aware interpretation of *nafs wāḥidah* in *Sūrat al-Nisā'*, presenting three views: one sees it as the universal human essence (*al-Qaffāl*), another as a historical-local reference, and the third—more widespread than the others—identifies it with Adam. Riḍā critiques the latter, arguing that the indefinite expression does not point to a specific individual, and terms such as "many men and women" suggest a broader human scope. He emphasizes the verse's moral intent, affirming human unity over biological origins, consistent with modern science and pre-Adamic Islamic narratives (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993, vol. 4).

Riḍā also rejects the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib as an *Isrā'īliyyāt*-influenced tale unsupported by the Qur'an, preferring an interpretation based on shared human nature, in line with verses such as *al-Rūm* 30:21. He clarifies that *thumma* in *al-Zumar* 39:6 does not imply chronological order, but rhetorical sequence, indicating the principle of pairing within a shared human essence (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993, vol. 4). Riḍā concludes that the Qur'an's avoidance of scientific detail serves its moral aims—justice, piety, and social ethics—and prevents conflict with evolving knowledge (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993, vol. 4).

Similarly, Fakhr al-Rāzī critiques the rib narrative and supports Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī's view that women were created from the same essence as men, not from his body. He sees the verse's address as universal and concludes that its goal is to assert human unity rather than detail biological origins (Fakhr al-Rāzī, 1999, vol. 9).

Al-Marāghī also views the rib narrative as non-Qur'anic and prefers the essence-based interpretation, affirming that the Qur'an intentionally remains silent on human origins to emphasize unity (al-Marāghī, n.d., vol. 4). Ibn 'Āshūr, while identifying *nafs wāḥidah* with Adam and his spouse Eve, insists that this does not imply male superiority and frames it within a theological vision of human solidarity (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1999, vol. 4).

Shi'i commentators provide even clearer support for essential gender equality. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i affirms that *nafs wāḥidah* refers to Adam and Eve but stresses human unity and equality, cautioning against using gender to imply superiority (Ṭabāṭabā'i, 1973, vol. 4). Other Shi'i scholars, such as Makārim Shīrāzī, similarly reject interpretations that subordinate women to men and emphasize the verse's egalitarian spirit (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1995, vol. 3).

Therefore, Wadud's claim that traditional tafsīr presents women as inferior does not hold when considering a broader range of interpretations, especially from Shi'i sources and moderate Sunni exegetes such as Riḍā, Rāzī and al-Marāghī. Her critique overlooks significant diversity within Islamic exegetical traditions, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and methodologically sound engagement with tafsīr literature.

7-2. Critique of the Creation Story of Eve and *Isrā'īlīyyāt* Narratives Based on Shi'i and Sunni Tafsīr

In her critique of traditional Qur'anic exegesis, Amina Wadud devotes considerable attention to rejecting the narrative that Eve was created from Adam's rib, attributing this story to the influence of Judeo-Christian cultures and *Isrā'īlīyyāt* (Wadud, 1999). She argues that such interpretations contradict the spirit of the Qur'an and the principle of divine justice and must be excluded (Wadud, 2021).

However, a close examination of Islamic sources and tafsīr literature reveals that although some Shi'i hadith sources, such as *Bihār al-Anwār*, *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, *Ṣāfi*, and *'Ayyāshī*, include narrations referring to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib ('Ayyāshī, 2001, vol. 1; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994, vol. 1; Ḥuwayzī, 1994, vol. 1; Majlisī, 1983, vol. 11), these reports are generally presented as transmitted sayings (*naqla al-aqwāl*) and are not accompanied by definitive judgment or endorsement.

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in *al-Tibyān*, explicitly rejects this narration and classifies it as one of the *Isrā'īlīyyāt*, asserting that it is incompatible with rational principles and the teachings of Islam (Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 5). Similarly, Ṭabrisī in *Majma' al-Bayān* follows this approach. While mentioning the narrative of Eve's creation from Adam's rib, he does not affirm its authenticity or accept it uncritically (Ṭabrisī, 1994, vol. 3).

Fayḍ Kāshānī also refers to these narrations and considers them influenced by the People of the Book, attributing no credibility to them (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994, vol. 1).

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, as one of the most prominent Shi'i exegetes, does not accept the premise that Eve was created from Adam's rib. He emphasizes that both men and women were created from a single reality and essence (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973, vol. 4). He believes that the Qur'an offers no indication of male superiority or female derivation in the creation narrative.

Many Shi'i commentaries clearly state that women were created as a human kind, not from Adam's rib, and that attributing such stories to the Qur'an is incorrect (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1995, vol. 3).

Among Sunni commentators as well, some refer to the narrative of Eve's creation from Adam's rib but do not endorse it (Qāḍī, 2009; Ṭanṭāwī, 1997, vol. 3).

In *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*, it is mentioned that all human beings were created from a single origin—Prophet Adam (PBUH)—whom God created from clay and into whom He breathed His spirit. Eve was also created from the same kind as Adam and is equal to him in nature, physical structure, and moral qualities. This shared creation is the basis for human unity, and maintaining this unity among all human beings—as the children of Adam and Eve—is both a divine and human necessity (Lajnah min al-'Ulamā', 1992, vol. 2; Zuhaylī, 2001, vol. 1).

Therefore, Wadud's claim that the narrative of Eve's creation from Adam's rib dominates the entire body of traditional exegesis is exaggerated and inaccurate. A close examination of Shi'i commentaries and several Sunni commentaries shows that many Islamic exegetes have either rejected this narration or mentioned it as a weak report, instead emphasizing the unity of human origin and the equality of men and women.

Wadud's methodological error lies in the fact that her critique is largely based on weak narrations and *Isrā'īlīyyāt*, while she overlooks rational, well-sourced commentaries, especially those within the Shi'i tradition and some from the Sunni tradition as well.

8. Conclusion

A comparative rereading of Amina Wadud's perspective alongside Shi'i and Sunni commentaries on the concept of *naḥs wāḥidah* reveals that, while Wadud, through a critical and feminist approach, seeks to extract the foundations of gender equality from the Qur'anic text and rightly focuses on verses such as *al-Nisā'* (4:1), *al-A'rāf* (7:189), and *al-Zumar* (39:6), her analysis is not without methodological flaws and requires serious revision.

Wadud attempts to highlight the essential equality of men and women by appealing to the concept of *naḥs wāḥidah* and critiques views that portray women as secondary and dependent on men, attributing such interpretations to *Isrā'īlīyyāt* and the influence of patriarchal cultures. This approach, particularly in its attention to the Qur'anic text and its critique of unreliable narrations, is defensible, and in some respects, aligns with the views of Muslim exegetes, especially within the Shi'i tradition.

Nevertheless, one of the major shortcomings in Wadud's analysis is her neglect of a thorough and comprehensive review of Shi'i exegesis and even certain parts of Sunni exegesis. Credible Shi'i sources explicitly emphasize the shared origin of men and women, firmly asserting that gender differences are not a basis for superiority. Moreover, many narrations regarding Eve's creation from Adam's rib are either unreliable or derived from *Isrā'īlīyyāt* and should not serve as a basis for Qur'anic interpretation.

Furthermore, contrary to the homogenized picture that Wadud presents regarding the dominance of patriarchal readings in Islamic exegesis, a careful study of the sources shows that numerous Sunni exegetes, especially Shi'i scholars, have themselves been critical of such interpretations. For instance, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in *al-Tibyān* and Fakhr al-Rāzī in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* both identify the narrative of Eve's creation from Adam's rib as originating from *Isrā'īlīyyāt*, considering it to lack solid grounding in Islamic teachings.

Accordingly, Wadud's critique appears to be directed more at specific segments of Sunni exegesis and *Isrā'īlīyyāt* traditions, rather than at the entirety of the Islamic exegetical heritage. Her analysis overlooks the interpretive potential within Shi'i tafsīr, resulting in a generalized and superficial portrayal of the exegetical tradition, with certain intra-religious dimensions left unexplored.

In conclusion, while Amina Wadud's attempt to offer a justice-oriented reading of the Qur'an and her critique of patriarchal interpretations represent a valuable contribution to the discourse on gender justice in the Qur'an, her analysis remains incomplete due to insufficient attention to the substantial differences between Sunni and Shi'i exegetical approaches. Shi'i exegetes, drawing upon a balanced and rational methodology grounded in the Qur'anic text and reliable narrations, have consistently emphasized the inherent equality of men and women and have challenged many of the extremist views regarding female inferiority.

This indicates that Shi'i exegetical tradition possesses considerable capacity to offer a fair and equitable understanding of women's status in Islam and can meaningfully address contemporary concerns about gender justice.

What is missing in Wadud's analysis is a recognition of the internal capacity within the Shi'i exegetical tradition to critique and revise patriarchal interpretations. Contrary to her assumption that reforming gender perspectives in Qur'anic interpretation depends on adopting feminist and external paradigms, a close examination of Shi'i sources indicates that many Shi'i scholars, relying on rational principles and sound hermeneutical methods, have issued strong critiques of discriminatory and *Isrā'īlīyyāt*-influenced interpretations.

Altogether, this evidence demonstrates that the Shi'i exegetical tradition, with its rational and *ijtihādī* framework, offers the possibility of revisiting gender-biased interpretations from within the Islamic tradition itself—without the need for unilateral reliance on Western feminist discourse. Therefore, achieving a justice-based reading of the Qur'an regarding the status of women and men depends less on borrowing external theories, and more on reviving the overlooked capacities within the Islamic exegetical heritage, especially that of the Shi'i school. This potential can pave the way for a reformed understanding and the realization of gender justice grounded in the Qur'anic text.

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