



**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF Wafa Sultan's A God Who Hates: An
Islamic Perspective**

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Abstract :

Wafa Sultan's A God Who Hates is among the contemporary works that present a critical portrayal of Islam, the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Islamic civilization. The book has generated considerable debate due to its critique of Islamic doctrines and its interpretation of religious history. This study critically examines the major arguments advanced in A God Who Hates from an Islamic academic perspective. Employing a qualitative and analytical research methodology, the study evaluates the author's claims in the light of classical Islamic sources, contemporary scholarship, and established principles of Islamic thought. Particular attention is given to issues concerning the concept of God, the status of women, jihad, freedom of belief, and selected historical narratives discussed by the author. The findings indicate that many of the book's arguments are based on selective interpretation, generalized assumptions, and insufficient engagement with the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. The study concludes that a balanced academic evaluation requires contextual reading of Islamic primary sources together with critical engagement with modern debates on religion and society.

Keywords: Wafa Sultan, A God Who Hates, Islam, Islamic Thought, Religious Criticism, Orientalism, Contemporary Islamic Studies.

Introduction

The relationship between Islam and the modern West has increasingly become a subject of academic debate during the last few decades. Numerous writers have attempted to interpret Islamic beliefs, history, and civilization through different intellectual, political, and cultural frameworks. Among these voices, Wafa Sultan occupies a distinctive position because of her outspoken criticism of Islam and her arguments regarding the relationship between religion, violence, freedom, and human rights.

Her book, A God Who Hates, presents a comprehensive critique of Islamic teachings by questioning fundamental theological concepts, historical developments, and the role of religion in Muslim societies. The publication attracted significant public attention and generated widespread discussion among both supporters and critics. Consequently, the book has become an important source for understanding one strand of contemporary criticism directed toward Islam.

The present study aims to provide a critical academic evaluation of the major themes discussed in A God Who Hates. Rather than approaching the subject polemically, this research examines the author's arguments through analytical discussion based on Islamic primary sources and recognized scholarly literature. The study seeks to identify the methodological foundations of the author's claims and to assess their academic strength and limitations.

By examining the book within its intellectual context, this research contributes to contemporary discussions on religious criticism, Islamic thought, and modern debates concerning faith, identity, and civilization. The study also attempts to encourage objective

scholarly dialogue based on evidence, contextual interpretation, and academic methodology.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing body of literature on Islam and contemporary religious criticism, relatively limited academic attention has been devoted to a systematic evaluation of Wafa Sultan's *A God Who Hates*. The book presents extensive criticism of Islamic beliefs, the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Islamic civilization, raising questions that have influenced public and intellectual discourse in both Western and Muslim societies. However, many of these claims have been discussed in popular debates rather than through rigorous academic analysis. The existing MPhil thesis provides a comprehensive Urdu translation and a critical discussion of the text, yet its findings remain inaccessible to the wider international academic community because of the language barrier. Therefore, there is a need for a scholarly English study that critically examines the principal arguments of *A God Who Hates* through an analytical framework grounded in authentic Islamic sources and contemporary academic scholarship. This study seeks to address that gap by providing an objective, evidence-based evaluation of the book's central arguments and their implications for contemporary Islamic studies.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the major themes presented in Wafa Sultan's *A God Who Hates*.
2. To critically analyze the author's arguments regarding Islam, the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Islamic civilization.
3. To evaluate these arguments in the light of authentic Islamic sources and contemporary academic scholarship.
4. To identify the methodological strengths and limitations of Wafa Sultan's approach to the study of Islam.
5. To contribute to contemporary academic discussions on religious criticism, Islamic thought, and Muslim-Western intellectual discourse.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the principal themes and arguments presented by Wafa Sultan in *A God Who Hates*?
2. To what extent are the author's arguments supported by historical evidence and authentic Islamic sources?
3. What methodological approach does Wafa Sultan adopt in presenting her critique of Islam?
4. How do contemporary Islamic scholars respond to the major claims advanced in *A God Who Hates*?
5. What contribution can a critical academic analysis of this work make to contemporary discussions on Islam and religious criticism?

Wafa Sultan: Intellectual Background

Wafa Sultan is a contemporary Syrian-born writer and psychiatrist whose intellectual discourse has attracted considerable attention because of her outspoken criticism of Islam and traditional religious authority. Her writings and public appearances primarily focus on issues of religion, freedom of thought, secularism, human rights, and the relationship between Islam and modern civilization. Following her migration to the United States, she became widely known through her media interviews and publications, particularly those addressing religious extremism and the socio-political conditions of Muslim societies.

The intellectual perspective of Wafa Sultan has largely been shaped by her personal experiences, socio-political observations, and critical engagement with religious traditions. In

A God Who Hates, she argues that many contemporary challenges facing Muslim societies originate from particular interpretations of Islamic teachings. Her discussion extends beyond theological questions to include issues related to politics, history, education, gender, and cultural development.

From an academic perspective, Wafa Sultan's approach represents one strand of contemporary religious criticism that interprets Islamic history and doctrine through a secular and humanistic framework. Her arguments frequently challenge classical Islamic scholarship and advocate the separation of religion from public life. Consequently, her work has generated significant debate among scholars, religious thinkers, and commentators, with some regarding her writings as an expression of intellectual freedom, while others criticize them for selective interpretation, insufficient contextualization, and inadequate engagement with the broader Islamic scholarly tradition.

Understanding Wafa Sultan's intellectual background is essential for evaluating the arguments presented in A God Who Hates. Her personal experiences, ideological orientation, and methodological assumptions provide the intellectual context within which the book should be analyzed. Therefore, a critical examination of her work requires not only an assessment of her individual claims but also an understanding of the broader intellectual framework that shapes her interpretation of Islam and Muslim societies.

Overview of A God Who Hates

A God Who Hates is a controversial work in which Wafa Sultan presents her views on Islam, religion, and contemporary Muslim societies. The book is organized around a series of thematic discussions through which the author questions a number of fundamental Islamic beliefs, historical narratives, and religious practices. Rather than presenting a purely historical or theological study, the work combines personal reflections, historical interpretations, and socio-political commentary to support its central arguments. According to the original Urdu MPhil thesis, the book consists of **thirteen chapters**, each dealing with different aspects of the author's critique of Islam and Muslim civilization.

The book addresses a wide range of issues, including the concept of God, prophethood, revelation, jihad, religious authority, freedom of expression, the status of women, violence, and the historical development of Islamic civilization. Throughout the text, Wafa Sultan argues that many of the intellectual and social challenges facing Muslim societies originate from particular religious interpretations. These discussions form the central framework of her criticism and provide the basis for the analytical evaluation undertaken in this study.

From a methodological perspective, A God Who Hates is primarily argumentative rather than descriptive. The author frequently supports her views through selected historical examples, personal experiences, and interpretations of religious texts. As a result, the book has attracted significant scholarly attention, with supporters viewing it as an expression of critical inquiry and opponents arguing that many of its conclusions rely on selective evidence and insufficient engagement with the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

The present study does not attempt to summarize every chapter of the book. Instead, it identifies the principal themes that constitute the core of Wafa Sultan's argument and evaluates them through a systematic academic framework. This thematic approach enables a balanced examination of the book's methodology, evidential basis, and intellectual assumptions before presenting a critical analysis from the perspective of Islamic scholarship.

The Concept of God: A Critical Evaluation of Wafa Sultan's Argument

In the opening chapter of A God Who Hates, Wafa Sultan employs fictional narratives and

symbolic storytelling as a literary device to criticize Islam. She introduces an imaginary character through whom she attempts to associate human fear and psychological anxiety with the concept of God. According to Sultan, the fear experienced by individuals in her childhood environment was inseparable from their perception of God. Reflecting on her personal experience, she writes that the fear she witnessed while growing up in a Syrian village continued to shape her own understanding until she migrated to the United States, where she eventually confronted and overcame that fear. Through this narrative, she argues that religious belief, particularly the Islamic concept of God, cultivates fear rather than love and compassion (Sultan, 2009, Chapter 1).

A careful reading of this discussion, however, indicates that the fictional account presented by Sultan bears no direct relationship to the theological concept of God in Islam. Rather than substantiating her claims through a comprehensive analysis of Islamic primary sources, she relies on personal experiences and symbolic narratives to generalize her conclusions about Islamic theology. Consequently, the argument reflects an individual interpretation rather than an objective examination of Islamic doctrine.

Sultan further extends this argument by linking the terrorist attacks of **11 September 2001** to Islamic teachings. Referring to Muslim suicide bombers, she states:

“When I think of the waste of human life we see around us, I am disgusted. I am horrified by the waste of life that is the young Muslim who blows himself up in the midst of a crowd of schoolchildren. He kills twenty-eight people and himself because he is entirely deluded by the lie, forced on him by his God, that the deaths of these children will buy him entry to paradise and his houris... If we want to transform others like the unfortunate young Muslim suicide bomber into reasonable human beings and preserve our world, we first have to help them see their ogre clearly and show them how to exchange their God who hates for one who loves.” (Sultan, 2009, Chapter 1).

This assertion requires critical examination in the light of authentic Islamic teachings. Islamic law categorically prohibits the killing of innocent people, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, age, or gender. The Qur'an explicitly declares:

“Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land—it is as if he had slain all mankind. And whoever saves one—it is as if he had saved all mankind.” (Qur'an 5:32) This verse establishes the sanctity of human life as one of the fundamental principles of Islamic law and unequivocally condemns the unlawful killing of innocent individuals.

Furthermore, the Qur'an prescribes severe punishment for those who spread violence and corruption in society:

“Indeed, the recompense of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land is that they be killed or crucified, or that their hands and feet be cut off on opposite sides, or that they be exiled from the land...” (Qur'an 5:33)

These verses demonstrate that terrorism, indiscriminate violence, and the killing of civilians are not sanctioned by Islam but are explicitly condemned as acts of **fasād** (corruption on earth). Therefore, Sultan's attempt to attribute acts of terrorism directly to the Islamic concept of God does not accurately represent the normative teachings of Islam. Her conclusion appears to be derived primarily from particular political events and the actions of extremist individuals rather than from the comprehensive teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. From an academic perspective, equating the conduct of certain individuals with the theological foundations of an entire religion constitutes a methodological generalization that requires careful scholarly scrutiny.

Wafa Sultan's Argument Regarding the Concept of God

In the fourth chapter of *A God Who Hates*, Wafa Sultan argues that the concept of God is essentially a human psychological construct rather than an objective reality. According to her, human beings create God out of their emotional, spiritual, and existential needs and subsequently allow this self-created concept to govern their lives. She maintains that throughout history people have fashioned God according to their own desires and fears, eventually reaching a stage where they could no longer distinguish whether God had created humanity or humanity had created God. To illustrate this idea, she writes:

“God is our feeling of need for Him—a need which extends from the most important request (‘Lord, bring my grandson back to me safely!’) to the most trivial... We ourselves created God, and then we allowed Him to create us. We shaped Him to fit our need, and then we allowed Him to shape us to fit His... The question remains: which came first, the chicken or the egg?” (Sultan, 2009, Ch. 4).

Through this statement, Sultan rejects the objective existence of God and interprets religious belief as a psychological product of human imagination. In her view, the concept of God evolves from human fear, dependency, and emotional needs rather than from divine revelation or metaphysical reality.

Critical Analysis

The above argument appears to be based primarily on philosophical speculation rather than demonstrable evidence. Instead of presenting historical or theological proof for her conclusion, Sultan assumes that belief in God is merely a psychological necessity created by human beings. This assumption overlooks the theological foundation upon which Islam is established, namely that belief in God originates from divine revelation (wahy) and is further supported by rational reflection upon the order of the universe.

According to the Qur'an, Islam is the religion chosen by Allah for the guidance of humanity:

“Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam.” (Qur'an 3:19)

Likewise, the Qur'an repeatedly invites human beings to contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth as signs pointing toward the existence and sovereignty of the Creator. Thus, the existence of God in Islamic thought is not regarded as a product of psychological imagination but as a reality affirmed through revelation as well as reflection upon the natural world.

The argument that human beings created God because of their emotional needs therefore represents a philosophical interpretation rather than a conclusion established through objective textual or historical evidence. From the perspective of Islamic theology, the order, harmony, and complexity of the universe constitute rational indicators of the Creator's existence, while revelation provides authoritative knowledge concerning His nature and attributes.

Wafa Sultan's Perception of Jihād and Terrorism: A Critical Analysis

One of the major arguments advanced by Wafa Sultan in *A God Who Hates* is the equation of Islamic jihād with terrorism. She associates acts of violence committed by certain extremist groups with the Islamic doctrine of jihād and argues that such acts are rooted in Islamic religious teachings. Referring to her personal experience during her medical education in Syria, she recounts the assassination of her ophthalmology lecturer, Dr. Yusef al-Yusef, in 1979. She describes the incident as follows:

“In 1979, when I was in my fifth year of medical school, I witnessed the death of our ophthalmology lecturer, Dr. Yusef al-Yusef. At first I didn't realize who had been killed. The

shots that rang out on all sides, sending everyone nearby into a state of shock, mingled with the killer's voice shouting from the loudspeaker: 'Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar!'" (Sultan, 2009, Ch. 4).

Based on this and similar incidents, Sultan attempts to establish a relationship between Islamic teachings and acts of terrorism. However, such a conclusion requires careful academic scrutiny because it generalizes the conduct of particular individuals to the normative teachings of an entire religion.

The Distinction between Jihād and Terrorism

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, **jihād** and **terrorism** are conceptually and legally distinct. Terrorism generally refers to the deliberate use of violence against innocent civilians with the purpose of creating fear, achieving political objectives, destabilizing societies, or coercing governments. Such activities include indiscriminate killings, suicide bombings targeting civilians, attacks on educational institutions, and the destruction of public and private property.

In contrast, Islamic scholarship defines **jihād** as striving in the cause of Allah through lawful means for the protection of religion, justice, and fundamental human rights. It encompasses both moral and physical struggle and is regulated by strict ethical and legal principles. Consequently, equating jihād with terrorism overlooks the fundamental differences between the two concepts in terms of their objectives, legal framework, and moral foundations.

Objectives of Jihād in Islamic Teachings

The primary objective of jihād in Islam is not the pursuit of political domination or material gain but the protection of faith, human dignity, life, and justice. Islamic law recognizes the defence of one's life, property, family, and homeland as legitimate rights. In situations of aggression, Muslims are permitted to defend themselves; however, such defence is governed by clear ethical limitations.

The Qur'an states:

"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not love the transgressors." (Qur'an 2:190)

This verse establishes two fundamental principles of Islamic warfare: the legitimacy of self-defence and the prohibition of aggression. Thus, military action is permitted only against those engaged in hostilities, while transgression against non-combatants remains prohibited.

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared that anyone who is killed while defending his property, religion, life, or family attains the status of a martyr. This Prophetic tradition demonstrates that the primary purpose of jihād is the protection of fundamental human rights rather than the promotion of violence or terror.

Critical Evaluation

A critical examination of Wafa Sultan's argument suggests that her analysis is primarily based on the actions of extremist individuals rather than on the normative teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. By interpreting isolated incidents as representative of Islamic doctrine, she overlooks the extensive legal and ethical framework governing jihād in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Consequently, her conclusion reflects a methodological generalization that does not adequately distinguish between the misuse of religious concepts by extremist groups and the original teachings of Islam concerning lawful self-defence and the protection of human rights.

Critical Evaluation of the Book's Title and Its General Narrative

The title *A God Who Hates itself* reflects the central thesis advanced by Wafa Sultan

throughout the book. Before presenting her arguments, Sultan anticipates a strong reaction from Muslim readers and writes:

“Most Muslims, if not all of them, will condemn me to death when they read this book. They may not even read it. The title alone may push them to condemn me. That's how things are with them. They don't read, or, if they do, they don't take in what they read. They are much more interested in disagreement than in rapprochement and they are first and foremost supremely interested in inducing fear in others with whom they disagree. They may even threaten to condemn you just for reading this book because, in their cruelty, they have learned something about how to control others. Nothing tortures the human spirit more effectively than making someone a prisoner of her own fear.” (Sultan, 2009).

This passage illustrates Sultan's overall perception of Muslim societies. She argues that Muslims generally respond to criticism with hostility rather than dialogue and that fear constitutes a dominant element in their religious outlook. On this basis, she develops the broader argument that Islam promotes fear instead of compassion and intellectual openness.

From an academic perspective, however, such assertions represent broad generalizations concerning the beliefs and attitudes of the global Muslim community. Although personal experiences may influence an author's interpretation, conclusions regarding a world religion require systematic textual evidence and historical analysis rather than individual observations. Consequently, the characterization of Muslims as uniformly intolerant or motivated primarily by fear cannot be accepted as a comprehensive representation of Islamic teachings without substantial empirical support.

Furthermore, the central premise of the book—that God is characterised primarily by hatred—is fundamentally inconsistent with the Qur'ānic description of the Creator. The Qur'ān repeatedly presents Allah as the Creator of humankind and emphasizes His wisdom, mercy, and perfect creative power. Allah states:

"And indeed, We created man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a secure resting place. Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and We made the clot into a lump, and We made the lump bones, and We clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators." (Qur'ān 23:12–14)

These verses establish that human beings are the creation of Allah and not the creators of God, thereby rejecting the philosophical assumption that the concept of God is merely a product of human imagination.

A critical reading of *A God Who Hates* further indicates that Sultan frequently employs autobiographical experiences, fictional narratives, and selected personal observations as the primary basis for evaluating Islam. While personal narratives constitute a legitimate literary method, they cannot, by themselves, provide sufficient evidence for assessing the theological foundations of a religion followed by more than a billion people. Academic evaluation requires engagement with the primary sources of Islam—the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the recognised scholarly tradition—before drawing conclusions regarding Islamic doctrine.

Accordingly, the present study argues that Sultan's critique is predominantly based on subjective interpretation rather than a comprehensive examination of Islamic primary sources. Her conclusions largely reflect personal experience and selected examples instead of a systematic analysis of Islamic theology. Therefore, while the book represents an important expression of the author's personal intellectual journey, its broader theological conclusions require careful examination in light of the Qur'ān, Prophetic traditions, and established Islamic

scholarship.

Wafa Sultan's Allegations Regarding the Status of Muslim Women: A Critical Analysis

Another significant issue raised by Wafa Sultan in *A God Who Hates* concerns the status of women in Islam. Throughout the book, she argues that Muslim women are subjected to discrimination and that their social position is largely determined by certain interpretations of Islamic teachings. In Chapter Eight, she writes:

“How can the men and women of Islam escape from this trap? I'm not sure they can unless they are willing to look critically at some of these marriages, not as an affront to Muhammad or his wives, but to help explain a Muslim man's attitude towards women and his treatment of them, given that Muhammad is their ideal.” (Sultan, 2009, Ch. 8).

On the basis of this argument, Sultan suggests that the attitude of Muslim men towards women is directly influenced by the marital life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). She further implies that the subordinate social position of Muslim women is rooted in Islamic teachings themselves.

From an academic perspective, however, such a conclusion requires a comprehensive examination of the historical and religious context of Islam. Evaluating the status of women in Islam solely through selected historical incidents or individual interpretations does not provide a complete understanding of Islamic teachings. Rather, the status of women should be examined in light of the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the socio-historical circumstances in which Islam emerged.

The Status of Women before Islam

Historical sources indicate that the social status of women in many pre-Islamic societies was significantly inferior to that of men. In several civilizations, women were deprived of fundamental legal, economic, and social rights. They were often denied inheritance, independent ownership of property, and participation in public affairs. In certain tribal societies, daughters were regarded as a source of social shame, while women were frequently treated as transferable property rather than as independent legal persons.

Against this historical background, Islam introduced a series of legal and moral reforms that fundamentally altered the position of women. The Qur'ān recognized women as independent human beings possessing legal personality, spiritual equality, and financial rights. It granted women the right to inherit property, own wealth independently, enter into contracts, receive a marriage dower (mahr), and seek legal protection within the family and society.

Accordingly, an objective assessment of the status of Muslim women requires consideration of the historical circumstances prevailing before the advent of Islam. Without examining the conditions that existed in pre-Islamic Arabia and other contemporary civilizations, it is difficult to evaluate the significance of the reforms introduced by Islam. Therefore, the position advanced by Wafa Sultan represents one interpretation of the subject but does not, by itself, encompass the broader historical and textual evidence concerning women's rights in Islamic civilization.

Researcher's Observation

The discussion presented by Wafa Sultan primarily focuses on particular historical examples and selected interpretations. A comprehensive academic study, however, requires analysing the issue within its broader historical, legal, and theological framework. Consequently, any conclusion regarding the status of women in Islam should be derived from the totality of Islamic primary sources rather than from isolated incidents or individual experiences.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that A God Who Hates presents Wafa Sultan's personal interpretation of Islam, its theological foundations, and its social teachings. Throughout the book, the author primarily relies on autobiographical experiences, selected historical incidents, and individual observations to formulate her critique. While such experiences may explain her personal intellectual journey, they do not, in themselves, constitute sufficient evidence for drawing comprehensive conclusions about Islamic doctrine.

The analysis presented in this study indicates that several of Sultan's arguments concerning the concept of God, jihād, and the status of women are based on selective readings of Islamic history and religious texts. A comprehensive examination of the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the established tradition of Islamic scholarship presents a broader and more balanced understanding of these issues. Consequently, evaluating Islam exclusively through isolated incidents or personal experiences does not provide an objective representation of its theological and legal framework.

Furthermore, academic inquiry requires that religious traditions be examined through their primary sources and within their historical and intellectual contexts. Therefore, a critical assessment of Sultan's work suggests that many of her conclusions reflect subjective interpretation rather than a systematic engagement with the foundational texts of Islam.

In conclusion, A God Who Hates may be regarded as an expression of Wafa Sultan's personal critique of religion and her lived experiences; however, its generalizations concerning Islamic beliefs and practices require careful scholarly evaluation. A balanced academic approach necessitates distinguishing between the actions of individuals, historical circumstances, and the normative teachings of Islam as preserved in the Qur'ān and the authentic Sunnah. Accordingly, the present study concludes that a comprehensive understanding of Islam can only be achieved through a holistic examination of its primary sources rather than through selective narratives or individual experiences alone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Future studies on Wafa Sultan's writings should adopt a balanced and objective academic methodology by examining her arguments in light of primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'ān and the authentic Sunnah.
2. Researchers should distinguish between the actions of extremist individuals and the normative teachings of Islam to avoid overgeneralization and methodological bias.
3. Comparative studies should be conducted between Wafa Sultan's interpretation of Islam and the interpretations presented by classical and contemporary Muslim scholars to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issues under discussion.
4. Academic institutions should encourage interdisciplinary research that combines Islamic studies, comparative religion, history, and contemporary political thought in order to evaluate controversial religious literature more objectively.
5. Future researchers should critically examine autobiographical narratives and personal experiences as historical evidence and distinguish subjective perception from established theological doctrine.
6. Scholarly dialogue based on mutual respect and authentic primary sources should be encouraged to promote a deeper understanding between different intellectual and religious traditions.



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