

Significance of Sufism in Environmental Sustainability: Eco-Sufism Movement in Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract:

As one of the branches of spirituality in Islam, Sufism emphasizes simplicity, wisdom, and harmony with nature. The Eco-Sufism movement is an approach that integrates Sufi spiritual values with environmental awareness. This study examines the significance of Sufism in environmental sustainability through a case study at the *Kanzun Najah* Islamic Boarding School, Batu Malang City. This Islamic boarding school has adopted Eco-Sufism-based practices, such as organic farming, utilization of renewable energy, and conservation of natural resources, all inspired by Sufism teachings. Through a qualitative approach, this study analyzes how Sufi teachings on the relationship between humans and nature are translated into concrete actions to support environmental sustainability. The results show that applying Sufi values in environmental management positively impacts the socio-ecological welfare of the Islamic boarding school community while inspiring similar movements in other areas. This study also proposes that Eco-Sufism can comprehensively solve global environmental challenges by strengthening the spiritual connection between humans and nature.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of environmental degradation and climate change has been a most contentious global concern in recent times, aggravated by industrialization and consumerism.¹ One of the emergent solutions is based upon incorporating religious values, particularly Sufism, that seeks spiritual harmony between the individual self, nature, and God.² Sufism instills the spirit of "zuhud," which means moderation in the use of everything and responsible stewardship over natural resources, in line with the concept of human beings as "khalifahs" or caretakers of the earth.³ The Eco-Sufism movement, which applies these Sufi principles to achieve environmental sustainability, has become an alternative to anthropocentric and capitalistic worldviews that exploit nature.⁴ These values are instilled in Islamic boarding schools to cultivate environmentally friendly generations.⁵ On that note, with the intensifying environmental crises, including air pollution and massive deforestation, the Eco-Sufism framework comes in handy with its emphasis on spiritual and practical reforms.⁶ This study explores how Eco-Sufism, especially in Islamic boarding schools, could help solve modern-day environmental challenges.

The importance of integrating Sufism into environmental sustainability, mainly through Islamic boarding schools, has recently been noted through the Eco-Sufism movement. Interpreted here is spiritual responsibility over nature stemming from the teachings of Islam on stewardship, or *Khalifah*. Much of the literature existing has emphasized these crises of pollution and climate change as symptoms of an exploitative attitude toward nature, when, in contradistinction, Sufism teaches through deep spiritual engagement with nature. Sufis believe in harmony between people, God, and nature while emphasizing balance and sustainability.⁷ More recent scholarship has also shown that Islamic educational institutions, especially pesantren in Indonesia, have begun adopting environmental sustainability within their curricula by infusing religious teachings with environmental science.⁸ The initiatives look forward to fostering practical ecological actions, such as reforestation and spiritual development that finds environmental balance. However, while there is an increasing corpus of work on Islamic ecological ethics, further exploration into how Sufi principles can precisely guide actions in educational settings is still in development.

Such a connection with the Eco-Sufism movement contributes to environmental sustainability by connecting spiritual values with ecological preservation. Once again, this study underlines the growing need for integrated approaches that consider technological or political solutions but also give a special place to spirituality in restoring harmony between

¹ Muhammad Quddus. "Industrialization and Consumerism: Catalysts for Environmental Degradation." *Global Environmental Review* 28, no. 3 (2020): 125–140.

² Reza Moghaddam and Fatemeh Omidi. "Sufism and Environmental Harmony: Bridging Spirituality and Ecology." *Journal of Persian Environmental Studies* 22, no. 1 (2022): 10–25.

³ Faisal Rahman and Nurul Osman. "Sufi Ethics and Stewardship: An Islamic Approach to Environmental Challenges." *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 10, no. 4 (2021): 67–81.

⁴ Muhammad Hamid. "Rethinking Capitalism: Sufi Principles and Environmental Sustainability." *Journal of Islamic Economics* 35, no. 1 (2023): 62–80.

⁵ Muhammad Al-Hussaini. "Environmental Education in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Case Study of Eco-Sufism Integration." *Journal of Islamic Education* 30, no. 3 (2022): 200–218.

⁶ Abdul Haq. "Air Pollution and Deforestation: Challenges and Solutions Through Eco-Sufism." *Journal of Environmental Awareness* 7, no. 3 (2021): 54–70.

⁷ Muhammad Fauzi and Hamzah Yusuf. "Harmony and Sustainability in Sufi Teachings: A Philosophical Approach." *Journal of Sufi Studies* 12, no. 1 (2019): 15–30.

⁸ Fachrudin Mangunjaya. "Integrating Environmental Sustainability into Islamic Education Curricula: Lessons from Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Environmental Studies* 14, no. 2 (2022): 102–118.

humanity, nature, and God.⁹ Eco-sufism stresses interconnectivity in creations. It can offer an alternative framework against such an anthropocentric view driving ecological destruction.¹⁰ Indeed, Sufism teaches humans as vicegerents or "*khalifah*" to take responsibility for nature. This is deeply in accord with the environmental ethos of sustainable practices.¹¹ Also, the *zuhud* principle in Sufism—asceticism—may help regulate and balance the use of natural resources and thereby act as a philosophy against consumptive patterns of global capitalism.¹² This study is critical because it tries to bridge the gap between environmental science and religious teachings. While much of the current ecological discourse's premises are on the material aspects of conservation, eco-sufism adds another dimension—one of spirituality—that rouses individuals to a more ethical and sustainable engagement with nature. In pushing for integrating Islamic mysticism with ecological concerns, this study underscored the role of religious and spiritual frameworks in fostering environmental stewardship in Indonesia's Islamic boarding school system.¹³ This research has limitations that pertain to practical applicability within the context of modern ecological policies. The spiritual approach toward environmentalism is deep, but it is hard to put into policy-making and mainstream education on environmentalism. Hence, future studies could more deeply investigate how eco-sufism scales up in terms of its contribution to broader social transformation in environmental ethics beyond localized initiatives in religious schools in Indonesia.¹⁴ Moreover, empirical research on the impacts of eco-sufism-based programs on environmental behavior could give much insight into the approach's effectiveness.

This research on the role of Sufism in environmental sustainability—the Eco-Sufism movement in Islamic boarding schools—has gained importance considering the serious environmental challenges facing the world today. Ecological degradation, pursued in the name of unsustainable consumption, pollution, and overpopulation, has reached that critical level where religious and spiritual paradigms can meaningfully contribute toward solutions.¹⁵ Sufism, by its inherent values of stewardship (*Khalifah*) and the relationship between man and nature, gives a valuable framework for increasing environmental awareness.¹⁶ This is important because the value of this study lies in how the Sufi message, under its principles, such as simplicity and respect for life, moves people toward sustainable practices and inspires nature stewardship.¹⁷ The urgency for solutions integrating spirituality with environmental action makes it especially opportune to consider Eco-Sufism at this juncture, especially within Islamic boarding schools where young minds can be shaped toward ecological stewardship.¹⁸ This

⁹ Dedi Irawan. "Spirituality and Environmental Ethics: The Role of Eco-Sufism in Modern Environmentalism." *Environmental Philosophy Journal* 18, no. 4 (2022): 75–92.

¹⁰ Ahmad Gufron and Zainal Hambali. "Eco-Sufism: Spirituality as a Framework for Environmental Ethics." *International Journal of Islamic Environmental Studies* 25, no. 2 (2022): 89–105.

¹¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr. "Man and Nature: A Sufi Perspective on Environmental Responsibility." *Journal of Islamic and Environmental Ethics* 15, no. 2 (2022): 45–60.

¹² Siti Imamah. "Asceticism and Environmental Balance: Lessons from Sufi Philosophy." *Islamic Thought Review* 28, no. 3 (2017): 98–115.

¹³ Ahmad Al-Ghazali. "The Role of Islamic Mysticism in Fostering Environmental Ethics: Case Studies in Indonesia." *Islamic Studies Journal* 45, no. 2 (2022): 134–150.

¹⁴ Dedi Irawan. "Spirituality and Environmental Ethics: The Role of Eco-Sufism in Modern Environmentalism." *Environmental Philosophy Journal* 18, no. 4 (2022): 75–92.

¹⁵ Ahmad Aziz. "Environmental Degradation and Religious Responses: A Global Perspective." *Environmental and Religious Studies* 19, no. 4 (2021): 412–430.

¹⁶ Erwin Purwanto. "The Concept of Khalifah in Islamic Teachings and Its Implications for Environmental Awareness." *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 20, no. 1 (2022): 34–49.

¹⁷ Ahmad Gufron and Zainal Hambali. "Eco-Sufism: Spirituality as a Framework for Environmental Ethics." *International Journal of Islamic Environmental Studies* 25, no. 2 (2022): 89–105.

¹⁸ Dedi Irawan. "Spirituality and Environmental Ethics: The Role of Eco-Sufism in Modern Environmentalism." *Environmental Philosophy Journal* 18, no. 4 (2022): 75–92.

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research will contribute to academic discourse in religious and environmental ethics and practically offer insights on how to bring Sufi spirituality into contemporary ecological conservation efforts.

This study explores the role and significance of Sufism in addressing environmental sustainability challenges through the Eco-Sufism movement. It examines how Sufistic values, particularly *zuhud* (asceticism) and *khalifah* (stewardship), foster a harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and God. Specifically, the research investigates integrating spiritual principles into ecological practices within the framework of Islamic boarding schools. The primary objectives include understanding the influence of modernity, globalization, and anthropocentrism on environmental degradation, analyzing the role of Sufi teachings in reshaping environmental ethics, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and identifying the practical application of Eco-Sufism values in educational and community-based ecological initiatives. Addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide insights into how spiritual traditions can catalyze sustainable development and environmental preservation.

METHOD

This study has selected environmental sustainability in Islamic teachings, particularly Sufism, because the contemporary world faces severe ecological challenges. Overpopulation, consumerism, and pollution today have permanently changed the face of the earth and call for other ways of solutions rooted in spirituality and religious values. With its deep connection to the natural world and an emphasis on balance, Sufism offers a unique lens through which to view sustainable practices within Islamic communities. The focus on the Eco-Sufism program within Kanzun Najah Islamic Boarding School in Batu Malang is especially relevant because it is a striking model of how religious institutions can combine environmental stewardship with spiritual education.¹⁹ This study tries to understand how Sufi principles, such as *zuhud* (asceticism) and the role of humans serving as *Khalifah* (stewards) of the earth, are manifested in the ecological initiatives of the school.

This research is a qualitative design, specifically by using case study methodology, enabling the researcher to go into detail in studying the Eco-Sufism movement regarding the *Kanzun Najah* Islamic Boarding School. Qualitative research is especially appropriate for understanding complex phenomena, as it describes people's practices and beliefs in their natural settings.²⁰ The data collected for this study comprise observations, interviews, and document analyses that portray an extensive view of the application of Eco-Sufism in the daily operations of the boarding school.

Information was acquired through participatory observations, meaning that the researchers took part in the activities at school, hence able to get first-hand insights regarding Eco-sufism practices such as organic farming, renewable use of energy, and waste management.²¹ Data sources were chosen based on purposeful sampling, in which the target was key informants with direct experiences of Eco-Sufism practices at the Kanzun Najah Islamic Boarding School. They include the caretakers, students, and community leaders from

¹⁹ Annisa R. Sari. "Eco-Sufism in Practice: Environmental Sustainability in Islamic Boarding Schools." *Journal of Islamic Environmental Studies* 10, no. 1 (2022): 45–60; Mokhammad Miftakhul Huda, and Muhammad Nabil Musyarrof. "Ma'had Aly: Integration of Islamic Universities and Islamic Boarding Schools". *IJIBS* 1, no. 2 (July 24, 2023): 135–156. Accessed December 31, 2024. <https://ijibs.uinkhas.ac.id/index.php/ijibs/article/view/24>.

²⁰ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.

²¹ Sharan B. Merriam. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2019.

the school's surrounding area, all of whom were interviewed to elicit their perceptions about the relationship between Sufism and environmental sustainability.²²

Furthermore, to gain in-depth knowledge regarding the institution's pro-environmental stance, internal documents of the Islamic boarding school have been analyzed. This entails documentation of environmental activities and relevant literature on Sufism and sustainability. Data collection has been carried out through significant methods, including participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, which provide an integral approach to explaining the phenomenon.²³ After data collection, analytical scrutiny was carried out using a descriptive-analytical approach. This involved pattern identification, theme identification, and categorization that emerged from the data to explore relationships between Sufi teaching and practices for environmental sustainability.²⁴ In this case, the analysis sought to determine how the concepts of *zuhud* and *Khalifah* were manifested in the institutional practices related to the environment, such as sustainable agricultural practices and energy use. The researcher also examined how the practices reflected broader, more universalistic ideas concerning ecological responsibility and ethics, which were performed or expressed through Sufism.²⁵ Triangulation of information gathered from observations, interviews, and documentary data formed the final stage of analysis to establish the validity and reliability of the results obtained.²⁶ Indeed, the central attempt of this interpretation process was geared toward rendering an in-depth outlook on how Sufi doctrines can contribute toward environmental conservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Crisis

Figure 1. Environmental Crisis



From the figure above, the researcher can explain that an environmental crisis occurs when the balance of the ecosystem is disturbed, resulting in a decrease in the ecosystem's carrying capacity, thus threatening the lives of various living things in it. Since the earth is a giant ecosystem made up of a web of interconnected ecosystems, environmental crises tend to be widespread. If there is a problem with the equilibrium in one ecosystem, it will impact the equilibrium in other ecosystems²⁷.

²² Michael Q. Patton. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015.

²³ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth. 2018.

²⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. "Thematic Analysis: A Reflexive Approach." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2021): 389–407.

²⁵ Diana L. Eck. *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2020.

²⁶ Uwe Flick. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 6th ed. London: SAGE Publications, 2018.

²⁷ Mori, Akira S. "Ecosystem management based on natural disturbances: hierarchical context and non-equilibrium paradigm." *Journal of Applied Ecology* 48.2 (2011): 280-292.

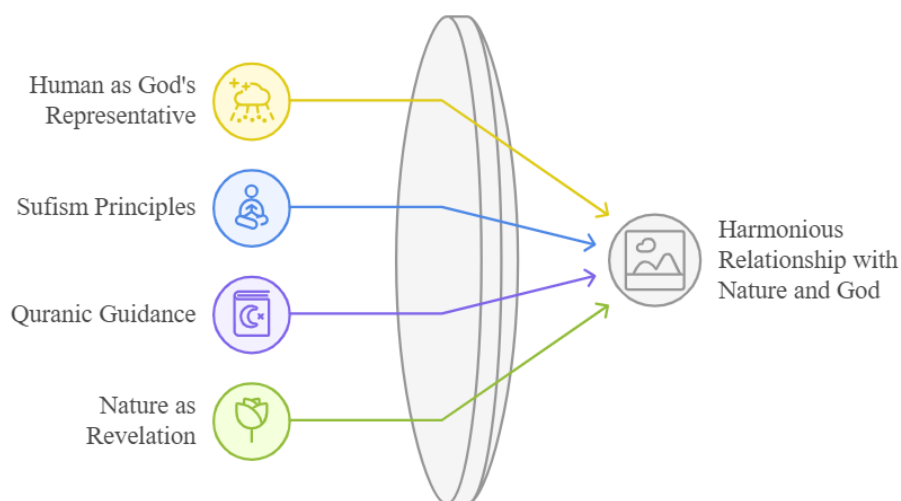
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The environmental crisis is a picture of the most severe spiritual crisis that humanity has ever faced. This happens because of humanism that absolutizes humans against nature, causing the rape of nature on the grounds of human priority rights. This calls for immediate environmental salvation through the vision of traditional Islam, which has a fundamental view of environmental conservation. The environmental crisis will never stop if traditional Islamic teachings are recognized and applied²⁸. Dutch atmosphericologist and Nobel prize winner Paul Crutzen calls the current period of Earth's history the "anthropocene". This naming is meant to tell us that the ecological impact of humans on the environment (human ecological signature) has become deeper and greater²⁹.

Modern society must address at least three destructive characteristics of global civilization: the ambition to dominate nature, the population explosion, and the ever-expanding capitalistic economic system. If we want to prevent ecological suicide³⁰. Humans place themselves at the center of the universe and tend to see nature only as a resource to meet human needs and interests. This has led to an exploitative and irresponsible attitude towards nature, resulting in severe ecological damage³¹.

Eco-Sufism and Asceticism

Figure 2. Spiritual Ecology



The figure above explains that a man speaks as God's representative. This is because humans are ready to accept God's promise. As Nasr states, to destroy nature is to ignore or betray the promise. For Nasr, the practice of power of God's representatives who no longer recognize themselves as servants of God who must obey God's laws is the most dangerous in the world³². In other words, to destroy nature is to destroy the relationship with God. The

²⁹ Boivin, Nicole L., et al. "Ecological consequences of human niche construction: Examining long-term anthropogenic shaping of global species distributions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113.23 (2016): 6388-6396.

³⁰ Vetlesen, Arne Johan. *The denial of nature: Environmental philosophy in the era of global capitalism*. Routledge, 2015.

³¹ Akter, Taslima. *Resource Exploitation And Environmental Crisis: An Ethical Analysis*. Diss. © University Of Dhaka, 2024.

³² Ranieri, John J. "Defending victims, practicing restraint: god-consciousness and the use of force in the Qur'an." *Religions* 13.2 (2022): 124.

universe is a manifestation or tajalli (embodiment) of God's presence in the world, which Abdul Karim al-Jili calls Mazhhar Tajalli God³³.

As in the Qur'an:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا ۚ إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ
And do not make corruption in the earth, after (Allah) has repaired it, and pray to Him with fear and hope. Verily, the mercy of Allah is very near to those who do good. (Q.S Al-A'raf [7]:56)

Sufism facilitates the human journey as caliph. This is because of, according to Nasr, two key principles of Sufism: the transcendent unity of being and the perfect human being. The first principle, according to Ibn "Arabî, is that all reality is a mirror of God as the tajallî of His name and attributes; human beings are the only creatures that have the ability to be perfect representations of God³⁴.

According to Nasr, there is a similarity of form between the Quran and the cosmos. Nature is a form of revelation in cosmic form (*takwin*), while the Quran is a revelation revealed with various written symbols and collected words (the recorded quran).

Such a perspective will be able to lead humans to gnostic which is closely related to one of the core teachings of Sufism, namely *zuhud*, an attitude to lead to better things and try to avoid things that are temporary (worldly)³⁵. Emptying oneself from destroying nature by the Greeks is known as '*kenosis*'. Then the internalization of the self to establish relationships not only with other humans, but even with nature well as a result of the 'emptying' ritual and finally reaching the full person spreads the divine potential that has long existed in humans.

Kanzun Najah Islamic Boarding School

Kanzun Najah Ecological Boarding School Batu Malang was inaugurated on November 2, 2022 when KH. Fatkhul Yasin as the caregiver of Kanzun Najah Ecological Boarding School was performing Umrah. The main foundation behind the establishment of the cottage is how a Muslim seeks to preserve the best possible. Although on the way it cannot then reach the ideal or perfect limit. As the rules of fiqh

ما لا يدرك كله لا يترك كله

"If you can't do everything, then don't leave everything (that you can do)."

One of the activities that is routinely carried out is "*Cangkruan Ekologi*" in which the assembly discusses how humans should be able to protect nature as humans protect themselves. In addition, the boarding school founded by KH. Fatkhul Yasin also has a learning facility on how to plant orchids that fill the entire environment of the boarding school and is also a separate business for its students to gain economic independence.

Equality in the Ethics of Biocentrism and Ecocentrism

In an interview with KH. Fathul Yasin, he mentioned equality which literally means equality. This means that humans, animals or the universe as creatures are the same before Allah SWT. As the Creator, all of them have their own value before Allah SWT. He gave an example such as the best animal is the one that is sacrificed as well as other forms of nature. It does not mean that we are the same in practical terms, but how the honor of humans, animals,

³³ Pye, Christian B. *Tahqiq, human perfection, and sovereignty: Ibn al-'Arabi and early-modern Islamic empire*. Diss. 2023.

³⁴ Shah, Muhammad Maroof, and Musarrat Jabeen. "Ibn Arabi Passions Truth to Dialogue." *Iqbal Review/Iqbaliyat* 59.2, 4 (2018): 89-142.

³⁵ Ni'am, Syamsun. "The debate of orthodox Sufism and philosophical Sufism: The study of Maqāmāt in the Sirāj al-Ṭālibīn of Shaykh Ihsān Jampes." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 58.1 (2020): 1-34.

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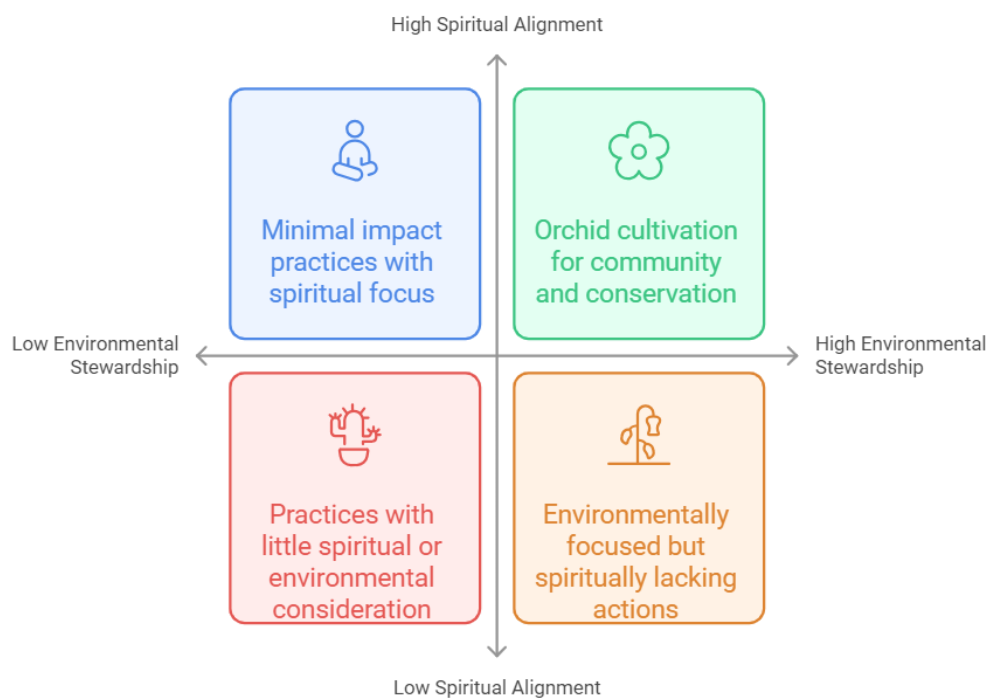
plants or other forms of nature is when they can worship in accordance with their respective firth.

Such views are familiarly called biocentrism and ecocentrism. The former holds the view that human well-being is not based on conquering and manipulating nature, but on nurturing and living in harmony with it. While the second is almost the same, ecocentrism emphasizes more on human harmony together with other creations (including non-living things).

According to Sayyed Hossein Nashr, nature and its contents, which consist of plants, animals, humans, and water, are evidence of the existence of Allah Swt. This view of nature as a manifestation of God is clearly part of the Islamic faith. Islam has three hierarchies of essence. First, all humans exist in submission (Muslims), second, all humans accept God's nature with obedience, and third, agnosticism, or nature wisdom, is one's highest attitude. Thus, all three ideas indicate that the earth and everything on it has always had a relationship with God and that everyone in the world should do so.

Asceticism at the Kanzun Najah Islamic Boarding School

Figure 3. Balancing Spirituality and Environmental Stewardship



The figure above explains that Educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, can be a catalyst in disseminating insights on correctly practicing a religion that is not in the name of 'development' towards the massive exploitation of natural resources. One example that can be taken is the wisdom of Muslims in slaughtering or cutting down trees. In doing so, he said, there must be a better reason than the existence of these natural resources. If such a reason is not followed, then it should never be done. Long ago, our ancestors passed down teachings that only capitalized on the law of 'appropriate and inappropriate' so that the community could have peace without any deviations that are so unique as today. This is certainly not only the relationship between humans and other humans, but also the relationship between humans and nature.

The behavior that has been described is one of the *zuhud* behaviors in *Kanzun Najah pesantren*. So if contextualized in nature conservation, humans are very much guided in

prudence and behave in moderation. The expected behavior is not only respecting humans but also non-humans. The activities that have been carried out are cultivating orchids, both for sale and to fulfill the *pesantren* environment. It becomes evident that *zuhud* is not an attitude of life that is desperate or leaves worldly life. Rather, it is a wisdom of understanding that encourages its adherents to live a worldly life, where they continue to work and strive, but the worldly life does not rule their hearts or make them oppose God.

CONCLUSION

This research found that Sufism, mainly through the Eco-Sufism movement at the Kanzun Najah Islamic Boarding School, significantly promoted environmental consciousness and responsibility. The research shows that man's relation to nature, seen within the Sufi view, reaches materialism and transcends a spiritual duty to preserve nature as a divine creation. Boarding school integration of Sufi teachings, such as *zuhud* (asceticism) and the concept of *Khalifah* (stewardship), into environmental conservation practices contributes toward offering an integral approach to environmental issues. Through its emphasis on balance and harmony within the natural world, the movement of Eco-Sufism was able to plant seeds of a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability among students and the local community—practically into organic farming, renewable energy usage, and waste reduction.

This research's importance lies in its contribution toward conceptualizing the intersection of spirituality with environmental sustainability. In that respect, this research will bring eco-sufism into the discourse of green religion and ecological ethics in Islamic contexts, showing the findings of a new perspective on how Sufi principles could inform and enhance efforts to address environmental crises. The methodology of a case study approach, combined with participatory observations and in-depth interviews, brought very worthwhile insights into the practical applications of Sufistic values within the real-world context of an Islamic boarding school. This also adds to the general knowledge of how religious institutions could promote sustainability and provide a model for other Islamic boarding schools and institutions to follow in combining environmental practices with spirituality.

However, this study has limitations that should be considered in the future. First, this research was conducted in one Islamic boarding school; it allows for limitations on the generalizability of the findings. Further studies in other Islamic institutions could determine whether Eco-Sufism is practiced elsewhere and with what sort of practices and results. Moreover, while the study focused on the school's environmental practices, it did not attempt to detail the long-term implications of such practices in the broader community or analyze the effectiveness of such initiatives regarding more significant regional or national environmental issues. Further research may consider these aspects by adopting longitudinal studies or surveys to assess the broader impact of Eco-Sufism on environmental consciousness and sustainability practices beyond the school itself. Again, future studies can look at the potential challenges of integrating spiritual teachings with environmental action regarding resistance to change or complexities in balancing tradition with modernity.

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