

## REIMAGINING THE TRIADIC RELATIONSHIP: HUMANS, GOD, AND NATURE IN CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM LITERATURE

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This article examines how contemporary Muslim literature reimagines the triadic relationship between God, humans, and the natural world in response to the modern ecological crisis. By analyzing a wide array of literary works, including novels, eco-poetry, digital art, and localized oral traditions, we explore how writers transform classical theological principles such as stewardship (*khalifah*), cosmic balance (*mizan*), spiritual excellence (*ihsan*), and divine trust (*amanah*) into a living narrative force. The study employs a qualitative-thematic approach combined with literary ecocriticism and textual hermeneutics to map these eco-theological expressions across diverse cultural and postcolonial contexts. Beyond mere textual analysis, the article bridges spiritual metaphysics with physical action, examining faith-based institutional models like Indonesian *eco-pesantrens* and green financial instruments like Islamic green bonds. Finally, we address the persistent gap between theoretical theology and actual environmental practice, highlighting urgent calls for policy integration and fossil fuel divestment. Ultimately, this research argues that contemporary literature serves as a crucial imaginative space to resacralize the earth, encouraging a shift from exploitative habits to a deeply felt, holistic model of environmental accountability.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Muslim Literature, Eco-Theology, Triadic Relationship, *Khalifah*, *Mizan*, Eco-Pesantren, Postcolonial Ecocriticism.

In the study of contemporary Muslim literature, Cooke (2022) notices a growing fascination with how humans, the divine, and the physical world interact. This is not just a sudden trend, but a deep response to the ecological crises surrounding us today. When reading these modern texts, I often feel that the authors are trying to solve a puzzle that is both spiritual and physical. They do not merely describe the destruction of forests or rising sea levels; they ask a personal question about who we are in relation to our Creator and the earth. It is as if the environmental crisis has forced us to look back at our oldest stories and theological principles to find a way forward, a process about healing our souls and saving our ecosystems.

While Safee and Yunos (2015) argue that environmental sustainability is deeply embedded in Islamic thought, many modern writers feel we have lost this connection in daily life, creating a strange tension in the literature. On one hand, there is this beautiful ideal of cosmic balance, but on the other hand, we see the destructive reality of greed. It makes me wonder if our current way of talking about climate change is too dry and technical, focusing on policy while ignoring the spiritual void at the heart of the problem. Contemporary Muslim literature, in my view, tries to fill this void by

offering a narrative space where the sacred and the material are reunited, changing how we feel about the world around us.

Looking closely at contemporary novels, Nahdhiyah et al. (2023) suggest that literature provides a unique space to imagine a harmonious connection where natural signs guide human characters. These natural signs, or *ayat*, are not passive background scenery but active participants in the drama of existence, where nature becomes a mirror reflecting divine wisdom and beauty. This is where classical Islamic principles like stewardship, or *khalifah*, and cosmic balance, or *mizan*, come into play. Although Kurniawan (2012) explains that the Quran clearly outlines human responsibility towards the environment, the way modern novels portray this responsibility is often complex and filled with doubt. The characters in these stories are rarely perfect guardians; they are struggling, flawed human beings trying to carry the divine trust, the *amanah*, in a broken world.

As Önal and Kanber (2025) beautifully illustrate in their analysis of eco-poetry, the earth itself speaks in a variety of voices that demand our respect and deep listening. This idea of a vocal, living earth is central to the process of resacralization. In many contemporary poems and stories, the earth is represented not as a resource to be exploited, but as a sacred sanctuary that sustains both our physical bodies and our spiritual lives. Perhaps we have become too accustomed to viewing the earth as a mere object. When modern Muslim writers use symbolic imagery of gardens, water, and light, as Safee and Yunus (2015) note in their work on environmental sustainability, they draw on rich Quranic metaphors to remind us of the divine presence in every corner of creation, making a powerful statement about the sacredness of our physical environment.

When Al-Tamimi and Abdellatif (2026) discuss the higher objectives of Islamic law, we see how classical frameworks like *Maqasid al-Shariah* can be dynamically adapted to support modern sustainability efforts. This integration of classical theology with contemporary ethics is one of the most exciting developments in modern Islamic thought, showing that ancient concepts are not frozen in time. For instance, Dallh (2024) explores how the principle of *ihsan*, or doing beautiful deeds with spiritual awareness, can motivate a deeply felt, proactive environmental activism. This is not just about following rules; it is about cultivating a state of heart that naturally seeks to protect and beautify the world, treating every living creature with kindness and reverence.

Yet, there is a persistent problem that many of these texts grapple with, which is the massive gap between these high spiritual ideals and our actual, practical behavior on the ground. Indeed, Bensaid (2023) points out that while the theoretical framework of Muslim eco-education is rich, its practical application in schools and policies remains quite limited. We have all these beautiful terms like *amanah* and *mizan*, but how do we translate them into sustainable cities or renewable energy policies? In the work of Catovic (2026), we find a passionate call for an Islamic energy ethic that would push Muslim-majority nations toward fossil fuel divestment, yet this call is often met with silence in political circles, exposing the painful disconnect between what we believe and how we live.

Following the insights of scholars like Kurniawan (2012), who emphasizes human accountability in the Quran, our work attempts to trace these narrative

threads across different genres and contexts. We want to understand how modern writers, poets, and even digital artists are reimagining the triadic relationship between God, humans, and nature. By examining these diverse expressions, we hope to show that Islamic eco-theology is not just a collection of abstract theological dogmas, but a living, breathing narrative force that can inspire genuine environmental stewardship. It is our hope that this analysis will contribute to a deeper, more holistic understanding of environmental ethics, one that bridges the gap between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the practical.

## **Method**

I have wondered how we can best analyze something as deeply spiritual yet physically grounded as eco-theology in literature, and I think a qualitative-thematic method offers the most flexible path forward. Instead of relying on rigid, cold statistics that might flatten the emotional and spiritual layers of these texts, this research employs a qualitative-thematic design that allows us to trace recurring patterns across diverse narratives. As suggested by Nahdhiyah et al. (2023) in their analysis of modern novels, the thematic approach helps us uncover how abstract theological concepts find concrete expression in literary storytelling. We are not just cataloging words; we are trying to understand how writers breathe life into the relationships between the human, the divine, and the natural.

To bridge the gap between literature and ecology, we rely heavily on the framework of literary ecocriticism. However, traditional ecocriticism has often had a somewhat secular bias, focusing almost exclusively on a binary relationship between humans and nature. To address this limitation, as Rahman et al. (2023) did in their study of spiritual journeys, we expand the ecocritical lens to include the divine dimension, thereby establishing a triadic analytical framework. I think this triadic ecocriticism is really important because, in Muslim writing, nature is rarely seen as a standalone material entity. Instead, as we see in the work of Zahra et al. (2026) on religious literature, the environment is treated as a sacred archive of signs pointing back to a Creator. By adding this spiritual layer, our ecocritical reading becomes more faithful to the worldview of the texts we are exploring.

Another central pillar of our methodology is hermeneutical analysis, which helps us interpret the deeper theological underpinnings of the texts. In his exploration of environmental ethics, Speidl (2026) explains how hermeneutical methods shape our understanding of stewardship, showing that the way we read scriptural and literary texts directly influences our ecological behavior. We use hermeneutics to decode how classical concepts like *khalifah*, *mizan*, and *amanah* are reimagined in contemporary prose and poetry. This is not a simple translation of terms, but rather an active reinterpretation. As Amin et al. (2025) note in their study on ecological hermeneutics, this interpretive process helps us see how ancient Quranic principles are dynamically adapted to confront modern environmental crises like pollution or resource depletion.

When it comes to selecting the materials for this study, we wanted to avoid the trap of looking at only one type of writing. We chose a varied corpus that includes novels, poetry, digital art, and even oral traditions. In her discussion of modern Arabic literature, de Dampierre-Noiray (2023) points out that blending different

genres allows for a much more nuanced exploration of belief and identity, which fits our goals perfectly. By looking at how these triadic themes move across different forms, such as Javanese oral myths analyzed by Fada et al. (2026) or contemporary digital art exhibitions discussed by Sebayang et al. (2026), we can see a broader picture of how Muslim ecological consciousness is evolving.

In terms of data analysis, our process is iterative rather than strictly linear. We began by reading the selected texts multiple times to get a feel for their overall tone, and then we started coding specific passages that related to our key theological concepts. It is a bit of a messy process, to be honest, because literary themes do not always fit into neat, pre-defined boxes. Perhaps that is why a more flexible, human-centered qualitative approach is so necessary here. We constantly moved back and forth between the primary literary texts and the secondary theoretical literature to ensure our interpretations remained grounded and respectful of both the literary artistry and the theological depth of the sources.

### **The Theological and Philosophical Foundations of the Triadic Relationship**

To fully grasp how contemporary Muslim literature reimagines our environmental crises, we must look closely at the theological and philosophical foundations that underpin these narratives. In his analysis of transcendence in modern fiction, Cooke (2022) highlights how writers try to portray a sacred reality that connects the human experience directly to the divine and the material world. This relationship is not merely a dry academic concept; rather, it represents a living triadic bond where humans, God, and the physical cosmos are constantly interacting. By positioning the environment as a vital partner in this triadic drama, these narratives challenge the cold, anthropocentric worldview that dominates contemporary society, suggesting instead that our current ecological struggles are deeply tied to a spiritual crisis.

When scholars like Safee and Yunos (2015) explore the concept of environmental sustainability within Islamic thought, they reveal a rich archive of ecological principles that seem almost forgotten in modern daily life. This disconnect is what modern novels and poems attempt to explore, exposing the gap between high spiritual ideals and our actual, destructive behavior on the earth. We begin to see that contemporary writers are not simply repeating ancient dogmas; they are reinterpreting traditional doctrines to make sense of contemporary crises. In doing so, as Nahdhiyah et al. (2023) observe in their study of modern narrative structures, they create a literary space where natural signs become carriers of divine meaning, shifting our focus from mere survival to a deep, respectful contemplation of the cosmic order.

At the very heart of this theological framework lies the complex concept of khalifah, or stewardship, which defines the human role on earth. As Kurniawan (2012) explains in his reading of Quranic stewardship, humans are appointed as vicegerents of the Creator, carrying a heavy responsibility to care for the earth and protect its ecosystems from decay. This is not a license for domination, but a call to humble service and accountability. In many contemporary novels, this concept is portrayed with a realistic sense of struggle. For instance, Alumona and Alumona (2025) note that the idea of stewardship in modern thought must incorporate a sense

of familial affinity between humans and non-human nature, moving away from a hierarchical model toward mutual care. When we look at how characters are depicted, we see that they are rarely perfect guardians, but deeply flawed individuals trying to carry this trust.

This ecological responsibility is not just an individual burden but is part of a larger, cosmic system of balance, known as *mizan*. In their discussion of cosmic order, Alumona and Alumona (2025) argue that this balance governs the entire universe, demanding that humans live with moderation, justice, and respect. When a writer portrays a landscape destroyed by industrial greed, they are depicting a violation of *mizan*, showing that pollution is a disruption of cosmic order. According to the analysis of Quranic environmental ethics by Kurniawan (2012), the physical world was created in harmony, and any human action that disrupts this balance is seen as an injustice with physical and spiritual consequences. Modern Muslim authors use this metaphor to remind us that our economic systems cannot be separated from the health of the earth, suggesting that true progress is impossible without ecological justice.

To move beyond a simple list of rules and obligations, contemporary eco-theology relies heavily on the principle of *ihsan*, which is often translated as spiritual excellence or doing beautiful deeds with deep awareness of God. In his exploration of integral ecology, Dallh (2024) explains that *ihsan* links our spiritual consciousness with our outward ethical behavior, making environmental care an expression of our love for the Creator. When we act with *ihsan*, we do not protect a forest merely because of a legal regulation, but because we see the forest as a beautiful manifestation of divine mercy. This perspective is highly motivational, especially in modern literature where characters find spiritual healing through their connection to nature. As Kasno et al. (2023) suggest, incorporating this level of spiritual consciousness into our ecological narratives changes how we think about environmental protection, turning it into a form of continuous worship.

We also see that this spiritual excellence is visible in how modern communities organize their environmental activism. In their studies of youth engagement in the digital era, Abitolkha et al. (2025) notice a growing movement where young people use social media and digital platforms to promote eco-theological values, driven by this desire for ethical excellence. This hands-on activism connects spiritual practices with practical tasks like planting trees and cleaning up rivers. By framing environmental work as a form of *ihsan*, as Nurhakim and Rahman (2025) point out in their comparative study of spiritual mindfulness, these narratives offer a profound psychological framework that can sustain long-term commitment to ecological causes, helping activists avoid the burnout that so often accompanies climate work.

Alongside *ihsan*, the mystical concept of *amanah*, or trust, provides a powerful epistemological framework for understanding our relationship with the earth. In their study of the human-nature relationship, Haji Moh Naseem and Gürbüz (2026) explain how *amanah* represents a sacred covenant accepted from God when other creations shrank from its immense weight. This trust obliges us to treat the earth with reverence and care, acknowledging that we are merely temporary trustees of its resources. In contemporary prose and poetry, this trust is often represented as a source of quiet, mystical responsibility. Writers draw on rich Sufi traditions to show

that every element of nature has its own intrinsic relationship with the divine, existing as a community of living beings with their own rights, which means our role is to listen and relate rather than to exploit and control.

By viewing the earth through the lens of amanah, contemporary literature fosters a spirit of deep ecomoderationism, or wasatiyyah, which balances human needs with ecological preservation. As Bakar et al. (2025) suggest in their thematic analysis of Quranic conservation, this framework encourages us to live within our limits, practicing gratitude and self-restraint in a world obsessed with endless consumption. This moderation is not a passive withdrawal from the world, but an active choice to respect the sacred integrity of creation. When poets write about the quiet dignity of a tree or the flow of a river, as Haji Moh Naseem and Gürbüz (2026) beautifully demonstrate in their reading of mystical poetry, they are inviting us to enter into a relationship of equality and companionship with the natural world, breaking down the barriers we have built between the human self and the environment.

When we try to translate these deep theological principles into practical frameworks, we see an exciting alignment with modern global ethics and environmental law. For instance, Al-Tamimi and Abdellatif (2026) show how Maqasid al-Shariah, the higher objectives of Islamic law, can be dynamically reinterpreted to include the preservation of ecological order as a fundamental necessity. Traditionally, these objectives focused on protecting life, faith, intellect, lineage, and wealth, but modern scholars argue that none of these can be preserved if our environment is destroyed. By linking ecological protection with the preservation of life and cosmic order, as Duc (2026) suggests in his work on jurisprudence and sustainability, Islamic environmental law becomes a powerful tool that can support global sustainability goals, providing a familiar spiritual language.

This legal integration has led to practical mechanisms that aim to operationalize stewardship. In his review of environmental governance, Arafa (2026a) highlights how classical institutions like land reclamation, natural reserves, and charitable endowments, or waqf, are being revitalized to address modern ecological crises. These are adapted into green finance instruments, such as green sukuk, which fund renewable energy projects. By grounding these financial and legal tools in Quranic injunctions and Prophetic traditions, as Catovic (2026) argues in his call for an energy ethic, these initiatives bridge the gap between religious devotion and practical policy, showing that our spiritual values can drive meaningful change.

However, we must acknowledge that there are significant challenges in making these theological frameworks effective on a wider scale. As Bensaid (2023) points out in his critical review of Muslim eco-education, there is still a massive gap between our theoretical heritage and everyday practices. We have these beautiful terms, yet they are rarely integrated into school curricula in a systematic way. In their discussion of environmental education, Mariyono and Wiyono (2026) suggest that if we want to foster a genuine ecological consciousness, we must move beyond occasional lectures and instead embed these triadic principles into the very fabric of our educational institutions. Without a systematic way to teach and practice these ethics, our ecological theology risks remaining a collection of beautiful but inert ideas, confined to academic papers while the earth continues to suffer.

In my view, this is where literature acts as a bridge, transforming abstract theology into lived experience and narrative power. By telling stories about characters who struggle to balance spiritual duties, modern writers help us feel the weight of ecological choices. As Cooke (2022) beautifully demonstrates, literature allows us to step into a space of imagination where we can experience the sacredness of the earth not as a distant dogma, but as an immediate, felt reality. It is through these stories and poems that the triadic relationship comes alive, inviting us to look at a simple garden or a drop of water and see the reflection of a cosmic balance that we are called to protect. Ultimately, by connecting physical survival to spiritual destiny, this literature reminds us that saving the environment is not just a matter of policy, but a journey of reclaiming our place within the sacred web of creation.

### **Sacred Earth, Symbolism & Cultural Localization**

When looking at how contemporary Muslim writers describe the earth, they are clearly not just depicting a physical landscape. They engage in a process of resacralization, trying to reclaim a holy connection that modern consumerism has flattened. I often think about how natural elements transform into spiritual symbols. For instance, Safee and Yunus (2015) discuss how environmental sustainability is closely tied to symbolic imagery. In their view, the natural world acts as a tapestry of divine signs, and contemporary authors seize upon this to reconstruct a worldview where the sacred is visible in every tree, leaf, or drop of water. This is not an abstract theological exercise; it is a personal attempt to change how we feel walking on this soil.

In modern poetry, the earth is often portrayed as a living witness rather than a passive backdrop. When Önal and Kanber (2025) examine how different poets give a voice to the earth, we see this living quality highlighted through intense musical and ideological expressions. The earth cries out, responds, and demands accountability. This makes me realize that we have treated the environment as a silent object for far too long. By reimagining the physical world as a sacred sanctuary, writers like Sebayang et al. (2026) explain that we can begin to heal the fractured bond between our inner spiritual state and our outer ecological reality. When we lose our respect for the sacredness of the earth, we also lose a piece of our humanity, a tragic theme in these literary works.

To make these spiritual concepts concrete, authors frequently use specific Quranic symbols, with water and gardens being the most prominent. As Siraj and Tayab (2017) show in their study of water in Islamic scriptures, water is not just a chemical compound but the source of life and spiritual purification. In many contemporary novels, a simple rain shower is never just weather; it is a manifestation of divine mercy that washes away both physical drought and spiritual apathy. Similarly, Kolkailah (2023) points out that designing gardens inspired by Quranic narratives is a way to physicalize the paradise promised in the afterlife. Authors use these garden metaphors to suggest that our earthly environment is a reflection of the celestial garden. When characters in these stories cultivate a garden, they practice a form of worship, rebuilding a tiny piece of Eden on earth.

We also see this rich symbolism of gardens and water extending into the digital sphere, showing how ancient imagery adapts to new technologies. In their study of

contemporary Islamic art exhibitions, Sebayang et al. (2026) observe that digital artists are using virtual spaces to recreate these sacred ecosystems. I must admit, I was skeptical at first about whether digital art could convey true spiritual depth, but seeing how these exhibitions use green light and digital water projections changed my mind. The research by Lee-Niinioja (2020) highlights how the green color of the paradisaal garden and metaphoric water are used as semiotic signifiers that cross cultural boundaries. These digital installations allow people in busy cities to experience a brief moment of natural and spiritual peace, renewing traditional Islamic iconography for a global, modern audience. It shows that our desire for the sacred will always find a way to express itself, even through pixels.

This digital renewal does not replace traditional practices; rather, it exists alongside a fascinating process of cultural localization happening in different regions. In Southeast Asia, particularly in Java, we see some of the most interesting examples of this localization. Authors in this region frequently describe how local Islamic practices blend with older indigenous beliefs. For example, Fada et al. (2026) analyze the concept of the Punden, a sacred eco-spiritual space where Javanese oral traditions and Islamic teachings meet. A Punden is often a grove of ancient trees or a spring protected for generations. While some orthodox perspectives view these local practices with suspicion, Mangunjaya (2023) argues that this integration benefits nature by grounding ecological protection in local cultural codes, showing that Islam did not erase the local love for the land but gave it a monotheistic language.

This blending of indigenous cosmologies and orthodox theology is not always easy, and contemporary literature does not shy away from the tensions it creates. When Amin et al. (2025) discuss the transformation of environmental paradigms through Quranic ecological hermeneutics, they show how scholars and writers build bridges between scriptural texts and local wisdom. In Javanese-Muslim narratives, characters struggle to balance ancestral duties with their desire to be seen as orthodox Muslims. Yet, as Munajib (2023) notes, the Quranic perspective supports local protection by emphasizing cosmic balance. By finding these ecological values in the Quran, modern writers show that protecting a local spring is not superstition, but a fulfillment of their Islamic duty to care for the earth.

To understand how these symbols operate on a deeper level, we must look at how modern scholars use cognitive-semantic and metaphorical approaches to interpret Quranic nature symbols. The work of Altohami and Khafaga (2023) explores the referential range of lexical pairs in the Quran, showing that terms related to nature are filled with layered, metaphorical meanings. When a text mentions rain, light, or mountains, it is pointing toward deeper spiritual realities. For instance, Erol (2025) connects the Quranic verses on repentance, or *tawbah*, with a Sufi eco-theology, suggesting that returning to God is intimately connected to returning to harmony with the natural world. If we pollute our environment, it shows we have polluted our inner souls, and cleaning the earth must begin with spiritual purification. This Sufi-inspired view turns environmentalism into contemplation.

It is interesting to observe how these diverse expressions, which range from traditional Javanese oral stories to high-tech digital art exhibitions in modern galleries, all point toward the same underlying truth. As Jiwa (2010) notes in her analysis of Muslim visual artists, representing these themes is a way of negotiating



identity and faith in a world that often feels hostile to both. By painting, writing, or coding these landscapes, artists do not just produce aesthetic objects; they create spaces for reflection. They remind us that the environmental crisis is not a scientific problem, but a spiritual crisis requiring a reorientation of our hearts.

Perhaps this is the most valuable contribution of contemporary Muslim literature. It refuses to let us separate our faith from our physical actions. When Safee and Yunus (2015) warn us about the consequences of neglecting our environmental duties, they are not just talking about physical destruction but about a spiritual loss. Every time we destroy a forest or pollute a river, we erase one of the signs, the *ayat*, that God has placed on the earth to guide us. The literature forces us to look at our actions in the mirror of the divine trust. It is a painful process, but it is also full of hope, suggesting that if we can learn to see the earth as sacred again, we can find the strength to protect it.

When we consider these regional variations, it becomes clear that there is no single "Islamic ecology," but rather a rich, pluralistic conversation. In Indonesia, as Yakub et al. (2023) explain, progressive intellectuals of Nahdlatul Ulama are developing a spiritual ecology that critiques economic exploitation while embracing local wisdom. This is very different from Turkish eco-poetry or New York digital art, yet they are all rooted in the same triadic framework. They all agree that we cannot understand our relationship with nature without also understanding our relationship with God. This shared belief creates a powerful sense of unity amidst cultural diversity, offering a holistic model of environmental ethics that is both deeply local and globally relevant.

### **Genre Variations, Contextual Narratives, and Postcolonial Critique**

In my reading of contemporary Muslim writing, I have come to realize that the triadic relationship is not a static theological dogma, but a dynamic narrative that shifts with literary form. When we move from traditional poetry to the modern novel, we see how different writers negotiate their spiritual duty toward the earth. As Cooke (2022) argues, the modern novel provides a unique phenomenological space, a spiritual third space, where the complex realities of human life are layered onto ancient theological truths. This literary canvas allows characters to struggle with their eco-spiritual duties in ways that are not always perfect, reflecting the messy reality of modern existence.

This active participation of nature is particularly visible in how novelists portray the subtle guidance of the natural world. In their study of contemporary novels, Nahdhiyah et al. (2023) describe how writers depict harmonious connections where characters find spiritual direction through natural signs, or *ayat*. This narrative strategy directly mirrors the Quranic invitation to read the cosmos as an open book of divine revelations. When a character in a novel looks at a dry riverbed or a blooming desert flower, they are engaging in a form of spiritual reading. This literary technique helps to bridge the gap between abstract theology and lived experience, making the sacredness of the earth a felt reality.

We see a very different, yet equally powerful, expression of this triadic bond when we examine contemporary Saudi literature. For instance, Al-Moghales (2025) analyzes how the Saudi novelist Taher Al-Zahrani, in his novel *Naḥwu Al-Janob*,

illustrates vibrant and reciprocal connections between human characters and their rugged physical environment. In these regional narratives, the harshness of the landscape is represented as a space of profound spiritual shaping and accountability rather than an enemy to be conquered. The characters do not dominate the land, but co-exist with it, feeling its pain and celebrating its brief moments of fertility.

If we move our gaze to East Africa, we find another remarkable example of this localized eco-spiritual imagination. In their analysis of the Ethiopian novel *Zigora*, Tarekegn and Alemu (2025) explore a rich literary landscape where God, human beings, and nonhuman nature exist in a state of deeply felt, mutual recognition. What I find so beautiful about this East African narrative is how it challenges the Western, anthropocentric separation of the human from the nonhuman. The novel does not treat animals and rivers as mere resources, but as a living community of beings with their own intrinsic value and spiritual standing.

This sense of mutual recognition is also the beating heart of contemporary Muslim eco-poetry, which often draws on classical mystical traditions to address modern ecological wounds. In their comparative study of folk poets, Önal and Kanber (2025) show how the traditional verses of Âşık Veysel and Âşık Mahzuni Şerif give voice to a living, suffering earth that demands our respect and protection. When reading these Turkish poems, I am always struck by how the earth is personified as a mother and a sacred sanctuary that sustains all life. This is not a romanticized, distant nature, but the fertile soil beneath our feet, the black earth that receives our bodies in the end.

This humble reverence and the heavy burden of spiritual trust are also central to the mystical poetry of Anatolia, which continues to inspire modern eco-theological writing. As Haji Moh Naseem and Gürbüz (2026) explain in their mystical reading of the poet Yunus Emre, the concept of *amanah*, or divine trust, is represented as an intense, personal awareness of our responsibility toward every living thing. In this poetic vision, to carry the *amanah* is to walk upon the earth with gentleness, recognizing that every flower, stone, and animal is a sacred gift entrusted to our care.

When we look at the literary landscape of Southeast Asia, we see a similarly rich integration of spiritual principles and natural imagery. In their *takmilah* analysis of Malay poetry, Yaacob et al. (2024) demonstrate how the anthology *Cakerawala Islam Nusantara* uses the natural world as a powerful guiding force for both intellectual and spiritual growth. The poets in this collection do not write about nature merely to praise its physical beauty, but use it as a ladder to reach a higher state of God-consciousness, or *taqwa*. By mapping the ecological features of the Malay archipelago, from the tropical monsoon rains to the dense jungle canopies, onto the spiritual journey of the believer, these poems perform a sacred task.

However, this sacred relationship is not only expressed in written texts, but is also deeply embedded in oral cultures that carry ancient eco-spiritual wisdom across generations. In her study of the Jbala region in Northern Morocco, Gintsburg (2025) decodes the oral poetic traditions to show how local communities embed their religious identity and ecological codes into their daily spoken verses. These oral traditions, which are often overlooked by mainstream academic studies, represent a living archive of environmental ethics. They teach community members how to share water fairly, how to protect sacred trees, and how to respect the cycles of the seasons.

We see a very similar process of oral and cultural preservation in Southeast Asia, where orthodox Islamic teachings are blended with local, pre-Islamic cosmologies. In their study of Javanese environmental discourses, Fada et al. (2026) analyze how oral traditions sacralize local ecological sites like the Punden, transforming them into protected, spiritual spaces. In my view, this blending of local custom with Islamic theology represents a highly creative way to protect local ecosystems. By framing the protection of the Punden, which are often ancient burial sites or natural springs, within an Islamic framework of respect for ancestors, these communities create a powerful barrier against commercial development.

This creative blending of genres and styles is not limited to traditional forms, having also found a vibrant home in contemporary speculative fiction, which allows writers to imagine alternative ecological futures. As Sadaf and Kanwal (2023) observe in their work on Pakistani speculative fiction, modern writers are increasingly using the elements of science fiction and fantasy to challenge dominant, Western frameworks of progress and development. By imagining future worlds where environmental collapse is met with a revival of Islamic ecological ethics, these speculative narratives democratize our collective futures.

Even in the realm of children's literature, we see this speculative, faith-minded imagination being used to shape the ecological consciousness of the next generation. In her analysis of modern children's books, Janson (2024) explores how stories that envision a Halal Happy Ever After help young readers navigate complex socio-cultural and environmental challenges. These books do not just teach children how to recite verses, but show them how to live as active, responsible guardians of the earth in their daily lives. By presenting relatable Muslim characters who plant gardens and protect animals, these stories make the concept of khalifah accessible and exciting for young minds.

Yet, we cannot talk about these literary representations of nature without also addressing the dark, realities of colonial exploitation and political injustice. In postcolonial contexts, the destruction of the environment is almost always linked to the history of colonial domination, which treated both the land and its people as resources to be plundered. In his postcolonial ecocritical study of Mourid Barghouti's memoir *I Saw Ramallah*, Daghamin (2024) exposes how the occupying forces use environmental destruction, such as the uprooting of olive trees, as a tool of political erasure. For Barghouti, the natural world becomes a powerful metaphor for healing and resistance.

This postcolonial critique is further enriched by the insights of diasporic writers who struggle with the pain of exile and the longing for a lost homeland. In their study of eco-colonial representations, Riaz et al. (2023) show how diasporic Muslim writers use their environmental imagination to heal the psychological wounds of displacement. When these writers describe the gardens and rivers of their childhood homes, they are not just indulging in simple nostalgia, but are performing a sacred act of memory that resists the cultural erasure of colonization. By connecting their personal grief with the degradation of their native landscapes, they expose the global networks of exploitation.

This intersection of environmental degradation, political injustice, and spiritual healing is also the central focus of contemporary Islamic ecofeminism. As Elrefaei

(2022) points out in her study of Arabic literature, ecofeminist writers draw powerful parallels between the exploitation of the natural world and the systematic oppression of women under patriarchal systems. These writers do not see these as separate issues, but argue that the domination of nature and of women spring from the same arrogant desire to control and exploit the sacred gift of life. By reclaiming the classical Islamic principles of balance, or *mizan*, these ecofeminist narratives offer a powerful critique of patriarchal structures.

### **Bridges to Praxis and Research Gaps**

When we look at the beautiful theoretical concepts of eco-theology, we often find ourselves wondering how these spiritual ideas can actually change the physical world. Writing poetry about a sacred earth is quite different from building sustainable communities on the ground. In my reading of the literature, I have noticed that the most successful attempts to bridge this gap are happening through faith-based institutions. For instance, Widodo (2026) highlights the *eco-pesantren* model in Indonesia as a powerful, whole-institution approach that embeds environmental ethics directly into daily school life and governance. These traditional Islamic boarding schools are not just teaching environmental science from secular textbooks; they are reframing the entire curriculum around spiritual duties. By making students compost waste, plant organic gardens, and conserve water as part of their daily religious practice, these schools turn abstract theology into lived experience.

In a similar way, Aziz Rekan and Mokhtar (2025) examine the development of *eco-tahfiz* schools in Malaysia, showing how memorizing the Quran can be actively linked to ecological responsibility. This integration of sacred text and physical action helps young people understand that protecting nature is a fundamental part of their faith. I find this approach promising because it does not treat the environment as a separate, technical subject, but as an essential dimension of spiritual growth. Yet, we might wonder how widely these models can be replicated outside of specialized schools. While Karman et al. (2023) praise the whole-school approach for fostering environmental awareness, we must acknowledge that many mainstream Islamic schools still lack the resources to implement such programs, suggesting that the *eco-pesantren* model remains a localized phenomenon.

This struggle to scale up spiritual practices is also apparent when we look at how communities manage daily waste. In their study of circular economies, Hashri and Bahara (2025) discuss how mosque-based philanthropy can turn simple waste management into an act of worship. By setting up recycling centers within mosque grounds, local leaders help their congregations view waste reduction as a spiritual duty. This community-based activism shows that faith can be a powerful motivator for local environmental care. Similarly, Anwar et al. (2025) focus on how Muslim women in Indonesia lead community-based waste activism, blending their religious values with practical civic action. These grassroots initiatives are beautiful examples of faith in action, showing that local communities do not need to wait for government policies to begin protecting their environments.

However, we must also look at the larger financial systems that shape our world, where the transition to sustainability requires massive capital. This is where Islamic green finance comes into play, offering ethical investment tools that align with

spiritual values. In their evaluation of sovereign green bonds, Musari and El-Khamlichi (2025) show how instruments like green sukuk in Indonesia and the UAE are funding renewable energy projects. These Sharia-compliant financial products allow investors to support climate action while adhering to Islamic principles of justice and social welfare. By directing private capital toward solar farms and sustainable agriculture, green sukuk prove that ancient religious ethics can find a sophisticated place in modern global finance. Indeed, Maqbool (2026) analyzes the policy framework in Pakistan, arguing that green sukuk can revolutionize climate action if supported by strong governance.

Despite these exciting financial and educational models, a deep and troubling gap still exists between our high spiritual ideals and our actual, systemic behaviors. For example, Bensaid (2023) points out that while the theoretical framework of Muslim eco-education is rich, its practical integration into national policies and standard curricula remains very weak. We have all these beautiful theological concepts like trust and cosmic balance, but they are rarely translated into concrete environmental laws. This disconnect suggests that we are still struggling to move beyond a purely textual appreciation of our faith. To make matters more difficult, Bisri et al. (2024) observe that the triadic relationship between God, humans, and nature is not fully embedded in general spiritual education, leaving many believers unaware of their ecological duties.

This lack of systematic integration is particularly painful when we examine the global energy crisis, where Muslim-majority nations have been slow to embrace decarbonization. In his critical analysis of energy ethics, Catovic (2026) exposes a major gap in fossil fuel divestment advocacy within the Muslim world. While many Islamic organizations promote tree planting or waste recycling, they are often silent when it comes to challenging the powerful fossil fuel industries that drive global climate change. This silence reveals a deep tension between our theological commitment to cosmic balance and our material dependence on oil and gas. I find it rather ironic that nations blessed with abundant sunlight are still so heavily tied to fossil fuels, showing that our eco-theology is often more reactive than proactive. As Abd-Elsalam and Binay (2024) argue, much of contemporary Islamic environmental theology is driven by short-term reactions to crises, such as water fatwas, rather than developing a comprehensive, long-term understanding of sustainability.

To overcome these limitations, we need to develop a deeper, more robust intellectual culture that bridges the gap between theology and practical science. In his call for a green knowledge culture, Widiyanto (2025) argues that we must integrate environmental ethics with the actual production of knowledge in universities. We cannot treat eco-theology as a separate, niche topic; it must become a guiding principle for economists, engineers, and scientists. It seems to me that we also need to engage more deeply with the metaphysical and ontological dimensions of our relationship with the earth. For instance, Santono et al. (2026) emphasize that a true resacralization of nature requires us to move beyond a superficial, utilitarian view of environmental protection. We must learn to see the earth not just as a resource to be managed, but as a sacred sanctuary that has its own intrinsic rights, requiring both deep intellectual work and sincere spiritual purification.

When we look at the path forward, it becomes clear that we must support interdisciplinary research and collaborative policies that can scale up these faith-based initiatives. We have seen that local models like the eco-pesantren can work beautifully, but they need to be integrated into national environmental strategies. In their review of environmental governance, Arafa (2026b) suggests that traditional mechanisms like charitable endowments, or waqf, can be dynamically combined with modern legal frameworks to protect biodiversity. By bringing theologians, financial experts, and policy makers together, we can begin to build the bridges that will turn our sacred narratives into a living, practical reality on the ground.

## **Conclusion**

In wrapping up this exploration of contemporary Muslim literature, I am struck by how deeply the triadic relationship of God, humans, and nature acts as a mirror for our current global crisis. The literary works, poems, and digital art pieces analyzed throughout this study do not simply repeat ancient religious doctrines. Instead, they actively breathe new life into concepts like stewardship, cosmic balance, and spiritual trust, making them urgent and deeply personal. What these stories and verses show us is that the environmental crisis we face today is not merely a technical or political breakdown, but a profound spiritual crisis. By treating the earth as a flat, dead resource to be dominated, modern societies have fractured a sacred bond, and literature serves as the quiet, persistent voice urging us to remember and repair this broken connection.

Indeed, the power of these literary narratives lies in their ability to bridge the painful gap between abstract theological ideals and the harsh realities of daily life. While it is easy to speak of the cosmos in perfect balance, the novels and poems we have examined remind us that living out this balance is a difficult, often messy struggle. They offer us a narrative space where we can sit with our failures, understand our greed, and yet still find the hope to act as genuine guardians of the earth. Whether through the simple, localized protection of sacred natural sites in Southeast Asia or the speculative imagining of green futures in modern fiction, these writers are showing us that faith can be a powerful, active force for environmental healing. They help us shift our perspective from seeing nature as an object of exploitation to recognizing it as a sacred sanctuary that we are trusted to protect.

To translate these rich literary and spiritual insights into concrete global action, I believe we must focus on several key areas of practice and research. First, there is an urgent need to reform our educational systems, particularly within Muslim-majority societies, by fully integrating eco-theological principles into mainstream curricula. We cannot expect future generations to carry the heavy burden of stewardship if their education remains entirely dry and disconnected from the sacredness of the physical world. By embedding the concepts of cosmic balance and ecological responsibility into both religious and scientific education, we can cultivate a deeper, more holistic environmental consciousness from an early age.

Second, the financial and institutional sectors of the Islamic world must be mobilized to support practical sustainability efforts. While the theoretical discussions around green finance and traditional endowments are highly promising, they must be translated into active funding for renewable energy projects, community

conservation, and sustainable urban development. This shift requires a courageous re-examination of our economic priorities, including a serious commitment to move away from fossil fuel investments. If our theology teaches us to protect the earth, our financial systems cannot continue to fund its destruction.

Finally, we must encourage more collaborative, interdisciplinary research that brings together theologians, literary scholars, environmental scientists, and local activists. Too often, these groups work in isolation, speaking different languages and missing opportunities to learn from one another. By creating shared platforms where spiritual narratives can inform scientific practice, and where local ecological wisdom can shape global policies, we can build a stronger, more united front against environmental degradation. It is through this patient, collective effort that we can hope to turn the beautiful ideals of our literature into a lived, lasting reality for the earth and all its creatures.

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