



RESEARCH PAPER

Climate Change and Environmental Ethics in Islam: A Global Responsibility Analyzing Islamic Teachings on Stewardship (Khilāfah) and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is an existential threat to the well-being of the ecosystem, people, and stability across the globe. In the context of scientific analysis and policy-making, religious systems are still underrepresented in the literature, even though they can be used to mobilize billions of followers to act in an ethical manner towards the environment. The teachings of Islam being among the major religions of the world provide some of the foundations of environmental stewardship (khilafah), equity, and moderation (mizan). These principles not only encourage responsible consumption of the natural resources, but also have moral requirements to the planet and all forms of life. This study explores the ecology of Islamic environmental ethics, which primarily focuses on the ways in which classical and modern Islamic teachings could be considered in the global sustainability models. This paper examines the main Islamic texts such as the Quran, Prophetic traditions (hadith), and jurisprudential interpretation.

KEYWORDS Islamic Environmental Ethics, Khilafah (Stewardship), Climate Change Responsibility, Sustainability In Islam, Religious Ecological Discourse

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most urgent international problems of the 21st century. The increasing temperatures, lost ice caps, depleted biodiversity, severe weather conditions, the rise of sea-level, and ecological systems out of order cannot be only environmental issues, as they have been closely connected to social justice, economic stability, and moral accountability (Bibi & Zeeshan, 2025; Nadeem, et. al., 2023). The international community is struggling with the issue of environmental degradation, and structures beyond scientific facts and politics are required. Religious environmental ethics is one of these frameworks and it defines the worldviews and actions of almost half of the world population (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2022).

Islam, whose theology is based on harmony, justice and balance offers a rich moral tradition as a way of understanding the relationship between man and nature. The idea of human stewardship, khilafah, makes human beings the guardians of the planet and puts under their responsibility the responsibility of preserving and managing the resources of the planet (Khan, 2021). The Islamic doctrine also focused on mizan (divine balance), tadamun (interdependency) and adl (justice) that together lead to ecological responsibility and equitable sharing of resources (Ahmed & Bhutto, 2024).

Despite the fact that the climate change discourse depends on such ethical premise, religious and cultural values are often overlooked in climate change discourse mainstream (Ibraheem & Rehman, 2021). The omission undermines the potential role of faith communities - particularly in areas with high stakes of environmental vulnerability

as in Muslim majority areas (Katohar & Begum, 2023). Inclusion of Islamic environmental ethics would aid in improving the climate tales, dealing with the holes in the ethics besides developing community based sustainability programs (Ahmed, 2018).

A lot of climate change policy is based upon secular scientific discussions without enough reference to the ethical, cultural and faith-based approaches. Subsequently, sizeable groups of religious groups, particularly the Muslims, might not identify climate action as a moral duty based on their religious customs. This discontinuity diminishes communal possibility of sustainable conduct and restrains culturally resonant methods of climate moderation and adjustment.

Key Concepts Defined

Khilafah: The Quranic term which implies the work of humanity as the custodians of the earth, as they are charged with the responsibility of taking care of creation.

Sustainability: A practice and policies that are aimed at addressing the current needs without interfering with the capability of the future generation to address their own.

Environmental Ethics: The moral principles that should govern human relationship with the environment and include justice as well as responsibility and human care of nature (Bakar, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the theory of environmental ethics, which highlights the moral responsibilities in relation to the non-human nature and the theory of religious ethics, according to which, religious beliefs may influence the moral conduct. In addition, it employs interpretive hermeneutics to comprehend the teachings of the scripture and how they are applied in the current world.

Literature Review

Environmental Ethics: History and Current trends

Environmental ethics as a discipline of study began in the middle of the 20th century, as a branch of philosophy, ecology, and anthropology exploring the possibilities of moral responsibility towards nature. Other major theorists, including Aldo Leopold, Arne Naess, and Holmes Rolston III, suggested the intrinsic value of natural phenomena, and proposed an ethical response of ecocentrism, rather than anthropocentrism (Kearney, 2009; Bhutto et al., 2025). Changes in this area have affected the international environmental policy frameworks, including the sustainability concept of the Brundtland Commission, which places much emphasis on intergenerational justice.

Western environmental ethics have their beneficial aspects; however, they tend to disregard cultural and religious moralities that are influential in the environmental perceptions of the world. Recent thought has focused on the importance of religious beliefs in environmental behavior in that faith traditions provide effective ethic inspirations in ecological stewardship (McDermott, 2012; Sarmad & Bashir, 2016).

Thoughts of Islam and the Environment: biblical basis

Islamic environmental ethics is heavily based on Quran and hadith. Nature is mentioned in the Quran as a sign (ayah) of the power of God to create many times, inspiring people to contemplate it and respect it. Other verses like verse 2:60 "And do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption" and verse 2:61 "He has subjected to you the sun and the moon... (Quran 14:33) state a vision of a good coexistence.

The idea of khilafah (stewardship) plays the main role: humanity is given responsibility to take good care of the resources of the Earth. This was developed by classical Islamic jurists (Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah) who stressed moderation (wasatiyah) and avoidance of excess (israf) (Mohammad & Muneer, 2020; Noor et al., 2025).

Incorporating Ibn Sina into the Modernist Islamic Environmental Scholarship

Over the last decades, Muslim scholars and activists have resorted to ecological issues. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Fazlun Khalid, and Ibrahim Ozdemir are the authors of works that claim that it is moral disconnection that causes environmental degradation. In her influential book, *Man and Nature*, Nasr re-reads the holistic cosmology of Islam as an ecological one (Nasr, 2010; Shah et al., 2018).

Groups including the Islamic Foundation of Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) and foreign fatwa councils have given a ruling on environmental matters, including climate change, waste management, and conservation (Osman, 2019; Afzal et al., 2023).

Islam and the Climate Change: Global Reactions

Empirical literature has shown that there were diverse environmental awareness among the Muslim populations. Research findings in Indonesia, Egypt and Pakistan suggests that religious doctrines can inspire green practices though socioeconomic factors and policy loopholes tend to cripple the process (Ozdemir, 2017).

Researchers believe that faith-based ethics should be incorporated into climate policy and that religious institutions can more effectively mobilize communities than the appeal to reason, because it is more effective (Suleiman, 2022; Bukhari et al., 2025).

Although substantial theological studies are available, there is paucity of empirical research on the ways of operationalization of the environmental teachings by Muslims in their everyday life as well as in their participation in policies. The current research will be useful in bridging the gap between theological concepts and the modern sustainability recommendations.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The current research fits a qualitative research approach, which is premised on the interpretive analysis, textual hermeneutics and theme-based content evaluation approach. Data sources include:

Primary Texts: Selected Quran verses, verified hadiths (Bukhari, Muslim), and the works of classical Islamic scholars.

Secondary Literature: Academic reports, articles and books concerning the problems of environmental ethics, sustainability, and Islamic perspective on the situation.

Interviews (Semi-structured): Environmental activists, religious scholars views and policy practitioners views (where applicable).

Data Collection Tools

Tool	Purpose
Document Analysis	To extract key ethical concepts in Islamic texts.
Thematic Coding	To identify recurrent environmental themes.
Field Interviews	To assess community perceptions and practices.

Data Analysis Techniques

Hermeneutic Interpretation: To contextualize scriptural passages within environmental relevance.

Content Analysis: To classify data into thematic categories (e.g., stewardship, justice, sustainability).

Triangulation: To compare textual insights with contemporary ecological frameworks.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Core Islamic Ethical Themes Identified

Theme	Scriptural Source	Ethical Implication
Stewardship (Khilāfah)	Qur'ān 2:30	Humans are caretakers, not owners
Balance (Mizān)	Qur'ān 55:7-9	Maintenance of ecological balance
Justice ('Adl)	Qur'ān 4:58	Equitable resource distribution
Moderation (Wasatīyah)	ḥadīth (Tirmidhī)	Avoidance of wastefulness
Interconnectedness	Qur'ān 6:99	Ecosystems are interdependent

As indicated in the table, the eco-friendly values of the existing sustainability ethics are upheld in Islamic writings on environmental sustainability. The principle of khilafah introduces human beings as custodians and not as exploiters of creation as well as in consonance with the current day sustainability models.

Table 2
Alignment between Islamic Ethical Principles and Sustainable Development Goals

Islamic Ethical Principle	Related Sustainability Concept	Corresponding SDG	Interpretation
Khilāfah (Stewardship)	Environmental governance	SDG 13 (Climate Action)	Human responsibility to mitigate and adapt to climate change
Mizān (Balance)	Ecological equilibrium	SDG 15 (Life on Land)	Preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems
'Adl (Justice)	Climate justice	SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)	Equitable distribution of environmental resources

Isrāf prohibition (No Waste)	Sustainable consumption	SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)	Avoidance of overconsumption and resource depletion
Amānah (Trust)	Intergenerational responsibility	SDG 17 (Partnerships)	Collective action for future generations

The comparison suggests that the conceptual overlap between Islamic environmental ethics and international models of sustainability such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is excellent. Sustainable development discussion is founded on Islamic values which are anchored on moral responsibility, moderation and justice-values. This means Islamic doctrines may favour in bringing about the culturally-grounded moral foundation of implementing international environmental policies in the Muslim-dominated societies.

Table 3
Observed Barriers to Implementation in Muslim Communities

Barrier	Description	Impact Level (High/Medium/Low)
Limited Religious Framing of Climate Issues	Climate change not widely discussed in sermons	High
Socioeconomic Constraints	Poverty limits sustainable lifestyle choices	High
Policy-Faith Disconnect	Weak collaboration between religious scholars and policymakers	Medium
Educational Gaps	Environmental ethics not systematically included in curricula	High
Political Instability	Governance challenges hinder environmental regulation	Medium

Findings indicate that despite the strong theological sustainability support, the practice has been experiencing numerous challenges. The deficiency of the religious discussion of the climate change situation, as well as the systematic socioeconomic troubles, are the two most conspicuous hurdles. This is in further support of the need to introduce environmental teaching in institutions and religious systems.

Discussion

The findings support the fact that Islamic environmental ethics is an adequate moral framework, which may be consistent with contemporary climate action policies. The Quranic vision of the world does not see nature as a resource, it is a demonstration of the signs of God (ayat). This religious wisdom advocates holiness, decency and temperance. The norm of khilafah constructs an alternative form of stewardship, other than anthropocentrism that is exploitative. Human beings are allowed to have power on condition that it must be done under the moral responsibility and accountability to God. Contrary to a secular structure that is dependent mainly on law-based or economic merit, Islamic ethics entrenches the environment as part of the spiritual awareness (taqwa).

Moreover, israf (wastefulness) is banned and this directly opposes the consumerist culture that is a significant source of carbon emissions and environmental degradation. Ecological consciousness at an individual level is signified by the Prophetic tradition of moderation--even when one uses the flowing river as the source of water to perform ablution.

Nonetheless, the research also indicates a disjunction between theology and the practice. In most of the Muslim dominated countries, environmental destruction continues to be a problem because of the issues of governance, economic development,

and lack of awareness. This explains why it is crucial to translate religious ethics into institutional policies and grass-roots efforts.

The concept of climate justice is also brought about by Islamic environmental ethics. Given that most of the Muslims majority areas are persistently exposed to the effects of climatic conditions despite the fact that they contribute very little to global emissions, Islamic teachings of justice (adl) support the need to adopt fair international climate treaties.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the Islamic teachings offer a powerful moral platform to deal with climate change and ensure sustainability. The fundamental ideas of khilafah (stewardship), mizan (balance), amanah (justice), adl (justice), amanah (trust), and the ban of israf (wastefulness) are all a moral vision that would be consistent with modern environmental ethics.

The qualitative textual analysis and thematic analysis conducted on the paper revealed that the Islamic principles of environmental ethics were in strong association with the global sustainability objectives. The findings indicate that environmental responsibility is not peripheral to Islam but faith and moral responsibility.

But regardless of this theological correspondence is the unequal application of this. Social Economic Limitations Structural constraints consisting of educational disparities, policy disengagement and social economic elements are constraints to the operationalization of Islamic ecological ethics.

This paper concludes by stating that the issue of climate change must not be merely a scientific or political problem, but a moral and a spiritual one as well. The awakening of the Islamic ethical discourses would be helpful in enhancing the environmental awareness, safeguarding the sustainable behavior and facilitating the climate governance in culturally impactful ways.

Recommendations

According to the results, the suggested policy recommendations are as follows:

Incorporation into Religious Education

Engage the study of the environment ethics in primary, secondary and tertiary level.

Prepare khutbah (sermon) instructions connecting Quranic teachings to climatic change.

Religious Environmental Activism

Motivate the mosques to go green (solar panels, water conservation, recycling programs).

Form alliances between religious bodies and environmental Non-Governmental Organizations.

Institutional Collaboration

Encourage the Islamic scholars (ulama) and policymakers to engage in discussions and devise regulations that are environmentally friendly and based on Islamic morals.

Engage religious leaders in national climate advisory boards.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Introduce awareness efforts that highlight that it is a religious duty to take care of the environment.

Use community networks and social media to spread eco-theological messages.

Through their efforts, the government can accomplish this.

Promote climate justice on Islamic equity and joint accountability.

Worldly collaboration should be encouraged in line with intergenerational trust (amanah).

Environmentally-friendliness Economic Policies.

Incentivize the Islamic finance institutions to invest in renewable energy and green infrastructure.

Establish waqf (endowment) initiatives in environment conservation initiatives.

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