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ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN ISLAM: ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Munazza Batool
BS Department of English, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women), University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation has emerged as one of the most significant challenges facing contemporary societies, affecting ecosystems, human health, economic stability, and the well-being of future generations. Climate change, deforestation, water scarcity, air pollution, biodiversity loss, and excessive consumption require comprehensive responses that combine scientific knowledge, effective public policies, and ethical responsibility. Islamic environmental ethics offers a moral framework for addressing these challenges through principles derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic legal and philosophical traditions. Central concepts include tawḥīd (the unity of creation under God), khilāfah (stewardship), amānah (trust), mīzān (balance), ʿadl (justice), and the prohibition of fasād (corruption and disorder on earth). This study examines how these principles can inform contemporary environmental protection, sustainable resource management, climate justice, and ecological responsibility. It adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach, drawing on Islamic ethical teachings and recent academic scholarship published between 2023 and 2025. The analysis considers both the potential contributions of Islamic environmental ethics and the practical challenges involved in translating religious values into environmental action. The study argues that environmental protection should be understood not merely as a technical or economic concern but also as a moral responsibility involving individuals, communities, institutions, and governments. It further emphasizes that religious education, community participation, environmental legislation, and scientific evidence are essential for translating ethical commitments into practical outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Islamic environmental ethics, ecological challenges, environmental sustainability, khilāfah, amānah, mīzān, tawḥīd, climate change, environmental justice, conservation, sustainable development, biodiversity, water management, Islamic jurisprudence, and ecological responsibility.*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation has become a major global concern because of its effects on natural ecosystems, human health, economic development, and social well-being. Climate change, rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, deforestation, water scarcity, soil degradation, and the loss of biodiversity threaten the sustainability of human and nonhuman life. Industrial expansion, unsustainable consumption, pollution, and inadequate environmental governance contribute to these problems in different ways. Gade, A. M. (2023). revealed that Although scientific research and technological innovation have improved understanding of ecological systems, environmental challenges continue to require coordinated action and responsible decision-making. Technical solutions alone may be insufficient when consumption patterns, institutional incentives, and social inequalities encourage environmental harm. Ethical perspectives are therefore important for examining the responsibilities individuals and societies have toward the natural world. Islamic environmental ethics provides one such perspective by connecting the protection of creation with moral accountability, justice, moderation, and the responsible use of natural resources.Islamic environmental ethics is grounded in the Qur'an, the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the broader intellectual traditions of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and moral philosophy. The Qur'an presents the natural world as part of God's creation and repeatedly draws attention to balance, order, and the consequences of human conduct. Surah al-Raḥmān (55:7–9), for

Journal Of
Islamic Ethics
And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
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example, emphasizes balance and warns against violating it, while Surah al-Aʿrāf (7:56) prohibits spreading corruption on earth after its restoration.

The concept of khilāfah, commonly interpreted in environmental discussions as stewardship or custodianship, is central to Islamic approaches to ecological responsibility. It emphasizes that human beings have responsibilities concerning the earth and its resources rather than an unlimited moral entitlement to exploit them. The related concept of amānah presents responsibility as a trust that must be fulfilled honestly and carefully. Together, these principles encourage the responsible use of land, water, forests, energy, and other natural resources. Ali, M., & Agushi, M. (2024). Explained that They also suggest that present generations should consider the long-term consequences of their decisions for future generations. Contemporary scholarship, including Gade (2023), examines how Muslim environmental thought connects moral responsibility with environmental justice, the rights of nature, and relationships among different forms of life. Such perspectives provide a foundation for evaluating whether human activities preserve ecological integrity or contribute to avoidable environmental harm.Islamic environmental ethics is particularly relevant to contemporary ecological challenges because many environmental problems involve questions of balance, justice, moderation, and accountability. Air and water pollution can harm human health, while deforestation and habitat destruction threaten biodiversity and ecosystem stability. Climate change can intensify droughts, floods, extreme heat, and other hazards, with particularly serious consequences for communities that have limited resources to prepare for or recover from disasters. The Islamic principle of mīzān emphasizes balance, while ʿadl emphasizes justice and fair treatment. The prohibition of fasād provides a moral basis for criticizing destructive practices that damage the environment and undermine collective welfare.

Environmental challenges are closely connected with social and economic inequality. Communities with limited financial resources may have fewer opportunities to obtain clean water, adequate sanitation, reliable energy, safe housing, and protection from environmental hazards. Meanwhile, the benefits of resource-intensive economic activities may be distributed differently from their environmental costs. Islamic ethical principles offer a framework for considering these inequalities through justice, compassion, public welfare, and the protection of vulnerable populations. Abd-Elsalam, A. M., & Binay, S. (2024). Elaborated on Zainab Amin (2025), in her study of Islamic legal foundations for climate justice in Pakistan, examines concepts including amānah, maṣlaḥah (public interest), and the prevention of harm in relation to environmental protection and climate governance. This approach connects ecological responsibility with legal institutions and public policy. It also suggests that sustainable development should address both environmental conservation and the fair distribution of environmental benefits, risks, and resources.The continuing severity of ecological challenges makes it important to examine how Islamic ethical teachings can contribute to environmental awareness, responsible behavior, and sustainable public policy. Although Islamic sources contain principles relevant to the protection of creation, the existence of these principles does not automatically guarantee environmentally responsible practices. A gap may exist between religious commitments and the everyday behavior of individuals, communities, businesses, and public institutions.

Journal Of
Islamic Ethics
And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXXX | EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How can Islamic environmental ethical principles contribute to addressing contemporary ecological challenges and promoting environmental sustainability and justice?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the relevance of Islamic environmental ethical principles to contemporary ecological challenges and identify practical approaches for promoting conservation, sustainability, and environmental justice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic environmental ethics examines the moral relationship between human beings, the natural world, and the responsibilities associated with living within God's creation. Its conceptual foundations are derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and ethical philosophy. Rather than treating nature exclusively as a collection of resources for human consumption, Islamic environmental thought can recognize the significance of ecological balance, the welfare of living creatures, and the moral responsibilities accompanying human use of natural resources. Its key concepts include tawḥīd, khilāfah, amānah, mīzān, ʿadl, and the prohibition of fasād. These concepts provide a vocabulary for discussing ecological responsibility within a religious and moral framework.Zuhdi, A., Bilhaq, M. A. M., & Putri, L. R. (2024). revealed that The principle of tawḥīd, or the unity of God, provides a theological foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of creation. Within Islamic ethical reflection, the natural world is not independent of its Creator, and human beings are not morally detached from the consequences of their actions toward it. This perspective encourages humility and challenges attitudes that regard natural resources as available for unrestricted exploitation. It does not mean that all environmental decisions can be resolved through theology alone. Scientific research remains necessary to identify environmental risks, understand ecological systems, and evaluate conservation strategies. Nevertheless, theological principles can influence the values and responsibilities through which communities interpret scientific knowledge and determine appropriate action.The principle of khilāfah is especially important because it connects human agency with responsibility. Human beings possess the capacity to transform landscapes, extract resources, develop technologies, and organize economic activity. These capacities create obligations to consider the consequences of environmental decisions.

Gade (2023) provides a significant contribution to contemporary Muslim environmental thought by examining environmental ethics in relation to rights, justice, and relationships among multiple forms of life. Haideri, M. H., & Parveen, Z. (2025). Explains that Her analysis indicates that Islamic perspectives can contribute to environmental debates by connecting communal responsibility, legal reasoning, and ethical concerns about nature. This contribution is important because environmental ethics involves more than individual attitudes toward pollution or conservation. It also requires examining the relationships between communities, institutions, economic systems, and ecological processes.Another important concept is amānah, which refers to a trust or responsibility. Applied to environmental issues, it suggests that the use of land, water, energy, and other resources

Journal Of
Islamic Ethics
And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXXX | EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

should be guided by obligations rather than unrestricted self-interest. The related principle of mīzān emphasizes balance, while ʿadl requires attention to fairness in the distribution of resources and environmental burdens. The prohibition of fasād provides an ethical basis for criticizing destructive conduct that damages ecosystems or threatens human welfare.Ali and Agushi (2024), in their study of Eco-Islam and environmental policy, discuss stewardship, moderation, justice, and compassion as principles that can inform environmental protection and sustainable living. Their research connects Islamic ecological ethics with education and the potential integration of religious values into environmental policy. This illustrates how Islamic environmental ethics can function as both a normative framework, defining moral responsibilities, and an applied framework, guiding practical decisions. The central challenge is ensuring that these concepts lead to effective environmental action rather than remaining abstract expressions of religious commitment.

The relationship between stewardship and responsibility occupies a central position in discussions of Islamic environmental ethics. The concept of khilāfah is often used to explain the human responsibility to manage the earth carefully, while amānah emphasizes the obligation to fulfill entrusted responsibilities. These concepts can inform contemporary discussions of conservation, land use, water management, energy consumption, and climate policy. They also encourage reflection on the difference between using natural resources to meet legitimate needs and exploiting them in ways that create unnecessary harm.Human activities can transform the natural environment through agriculture, construction, transportation, industrial production, and energy generation. These activities are necessary for many aspects of social and economic development, but they can also contribute to pollution, habitat destruction, and resource depletion. Islamic stewardship does not necessarily require the rejection of economic development or technological innovation. Rather, it provides a moral basis for assessing whether development is conducted responsibly, whether its benefits are distributed fairly, and whether its environmental consequences are acceptable.Haideri (2025) examines Islamic faith and ethics in the context of environmental sustainability, focusing on principles such as tawḥīd, khilāfah, mīzān, justice, and wisdom. The study uses a qualitative, text-based approach to connect Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings with contemporary environmental concerns. Its analysis supports an understanding of environmental protection as both a spiritual responsibility and a practical ethical obligation. Stewardship also raises questions about the responsibilities of institutions. Environmental damage may result from decisions made by corporations, government departments, agricultural organizations, and other entities whose activities affect large populations.

Malik (2025), in his analysis of the Islamic concept of environmental stewardship in the context of climate change, examines the relevance of khilāfah to environmental governance and sustainable practices. The study connects Islamic teachings concerning resource protection with contemporary climate challenges. This perspective is useful because it moves environmental ethics beyond personal virtue toward collective responsibility and institutional decision-making.Intergenerational responsibility is another important implication of stewardship. Decisions made today can influence water availability, soil quality, biodiversity, and climate conditions for decades. Future generations cannot participate directly in current decisions, yet they may bear substantial costs when environmental resources are depleted or ecosystems are damaged. Amin, Z. H., Azad, I., & Din, T. M. U. (2025). Explained that An ethical understanding of stewardship therefore encourages decision-makers to consider long-

Journal Of
Islamic Ethics
And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXXX | EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

term consequences rather than prioritizing immediate benefits alone.Nevertheless, stewardship must be interpreted carefully. It should not be used to justify unrestricted human control over nature or to imply that environmental protection can be achieved solely through religious motivation. Scientific assessment, environmental regulation, community participation, and public accountability remain essential. The contribution of khilāfah and amānah lies in providing moral reasons for using these mechanisms responsibly and in ways that protect both human welfare and ecological integrity.The Islamic concept of mīzān, or balance, is relevant to ecological sustainability because natural systems depend on complex relationships among living organisms, water, soil, air, climate, and energy. The Qur'anic emphasis on balance encourages reflection on the consequences of disrupting these relationships. Although the concept should not be treated as a substitute for scientific ecological models, it provides a moral perspective that supports restraint, conservation, and responsible resource use.

One of the major environmental challenges facing contemporary societies is excessive consumption. Consumer behavior can increase the demand for energy, water, raw materials, and manufactured goods. When consumption exceeds sustainable levels, it may contribute to waste generation, resource depletion, pollution, and habitat loss. Islamic teachings against wastefulness offer a basis for evaluating these patterns of behavior. The ethical principle of moderation encourages individuals and institutions to distinguish between genuine needs and unnecessary excess.Water management is a particularly relevant example. Water is essential for drinking, sanitation, agriculture, industry, and ecosystem survival, yet many regions face water scarcity, contamination, or unequal access. Malik, F., Khan Bhettani, M., Mansoor, J., Arslan, Z., Khan, M. S., Amin, I., ... & Sharif, A. (2025). found that Islamic moral teachings concerning moderation and the avoidance of waste can support responsible water use in homes, mosques, agricultural activities, and public institutions. Practical measures may include repairing leaks, improving irrigation efficiency, protecting watersheds, reducing contamination, and ensuring fair access to safe water.The same reasoning applies to energy consumption. Reducing unnecessary energy use, improving building efficiency, supporting appropriate renewable energy technologies, and limiting pollution can be consistent with environmental stewardship. However, the feasibility of these measures depends on local infrastructure, economic resources, and technological availability. Ethical recommendations should therefore recognize that low-income households may lack the financial capacity to adopt certain environmentally preferable technologies without institutional assistance.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology to examine the contribution of Islamic environmental ethics to addressing contemporary ecological challenges. The research draws on two principal categories of material: primary Islamic sources, particularly the Qur'an and Sunnah, and secondary academic literature published between 2023 and 2025. The primary sources provide the normative foundation for examining environmental responsibility, while the secondary literature contributes contemporary analysis of ecological sustainability, climate justice, environmental governance, conservation, and resource management. Relevant publications were identified through searches using combinations of terms such as "Islamic environmental ethics," "Islam and climate change," "Islamic environmental stewardship," "Eco-Islam," "Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah and sustainability," and "environmental justice in Islamic law." The selection process prioritized publications directly

Journal Of
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And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
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related to the research question, identifiable academic or institutional sources, and clear discussions of Islamic principles and contemporary environmental problems. The selected materials were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis, focusing on khilāfah, amānah, mīzān, tawḥīd, ʿadl, maṣlaḥah, moderation, and the prevention of environmental harm. Each concept was examined in relation to specific ecological concerns, including climate change, water scarcity, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, excessive consumption, and environmental inequality. The study then compared the ethical arguments presented across the literature to identify common principles, differences in interpretation, practical applications, and limitations. Particular attention was given to the relationship between individual moral responsibility and institutional obligations, since environmental problems frequently result from interconnected social, economic, political, and ecological factors.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research follows a qualitative, descriptive-analytical, and interpretive design. Its descriptive component identifies major ecological challenges and the Islamic ethical concepts relevant to them. Its interpretive component examines the meanings of these concepts within Islamic sources and contemporary scholarly discussions. The analytical component evaluates how the principles may inform individual behavior, community initiatives, institutional decisions, and environmental policies. The study is organized around five interconnected dimensions: stewardship and responsibility for creation; ecological balance and moderation; environmental justice and climate vulnerability; biodiversity and the protection of living creatures; and environmental education and governance. Each dimension is examined through a structured comparison between the relevant ethical principles and the practical requirements of environmental protection. For example, khilāfah and amānah are considered in relation to responsible resource management, while mīzān is examined in relation to moderation, waste reduction, and the sustainable use of natural resources. The principles of justice and public welfare are considered in relation to unequal exposure to pollution, climate hazards, and the distribution of environmental resources. The unit of analysis is the relationship between an Islamic ethical principle and its proposed application to a contemporary ecological problem. The design also distinguishes between individual, community, and institutional levels of responsibility. Individuals can conserve water and reduce waste, communities can organize conservation programs, and public institutions can establish environmental standards, monitor pollution, and enforce regulations. These responsibilities are interconnected, and the study does not assume that individual lifestyle changes alone can resolve structural environmental problems.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis uses qualitative thematic synthesis to identify recurring ethical concepts and examine their relevance to contemporary environmental challenges. The first theme is stewardship and responsibility, represented by khilāfah and amānah. This theme concerns the obligation to manage natural resources responsibly and consider the long-term consequences of human activity. The second theme is ecological balance and moderation, represented by mīzān and teachings against wastefulness. This theme is relevant to excessive consumption, water management, energy use, sustainable agriculture, and waste reduction. The third theme is environmental justice, which connects ʿadl, compassion, and public welfare with unequal

Journal Of
Islamic Ethics
And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXXX | EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

exposure to environmental hazards and differences in access to resources. The fourth theme is biodiversity and the protection of living creatures, which examines how Islamic ethical teachings can inform responsible treatment of animals, habitat conservation, and the preservation of ecological relationships. The fifth theme is environmental education and institutional governance, which considers how religious values may be incorporated into educational activities, community initiatives, and environmental policies. After identifying these themes, the analysis compares their applications across different ecological problems. For example, water scarcity can be examined through stewardship, moderation, and justice because it involves responsible use, avoidance of waste, and equitable access. Climate change similarly involves stewardship, institutional accountability, protection of vulnerable communities, and consideration of future generations. Biodiversity protection connects the responsibilities of human beings with the welfare of other living creatures and the integrity of ecosystems. The analysis also considers overlaps among themes, recognizing that environmental challenges rarely fall within a single ethical category.

FINDINGS

The analysis identifies six principal findings concerning the contribution of Islamic environmental ethics to contemporary ecological challenges. First, stewardship and trustworthiness provide a moral basis for understanding environmental protection as a human responsibility. The concepts of khilāfah and amānah encourage careful management of natural resources and attention to the long-term consequences of human activity. Second, ecological balance and moderation are relevant to excessive consumption, water scarcity, waste generation, and unsustainable resource use. The principle of mīzān can encourage individuals and institutions to evaluate whether their activities preserve ecological stability and avoid unnecessary harm. Third, Islamic environmental ethics can contribute to environmental justice by emphasizing fairness, compassion, public welfare, and protection of vulnerable communities. This is particularly important where climate-related hazards, pollution, and unequal access to resources place disproportionate burdens on disadvantaged populations. Fourth, the literature supports an understanding of environmental responsibility that includes biodiversity and the welfare of living creatures. Conservation can therefore be considered in relation to ecological relationships and the responsibilities humans have toward other forms of life, rather than solely through immediate economic benefits. Fifth, environmental education and community participation provide potential mechanisms for translating ethical principles into practice. Mosques, schools, universities, and community organizations can promote water conservation, waste reduction, responsible consumption, and local environmental awareness. Sixth, institutional governance is essential for addressing environmental problems that extend beyond individual behavior. Effective pollution control, sustainable resource management, climate adaptation, and biodiversity conservation require transparent policies, scientific assessment, adequate funding, and mechanisms for public accountability.

CONCLUSION

Environmental ethics in Islam provides a significant moral framework for addressing contemporary ecological challenges, including climate change, pollution, water scarcity, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable consumption. This study has examined

Journal Of
Islamic Ethics
And Contemporary Thought
VOL 1 | NO. 1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXXX | EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

how Islamic principles derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic ethical and legal traditions can inform environmental protection and sustainable development. The analysis highlights the importance of khilāfah, amānah, mīzān, tawḥīd, justice, moderation, and the prevention of harm. Together, these concepts encourage responsible resource management, respect for ecological balance, and consideration of the consequences of human activity for present and future generations. The discussion also demonstrates that environmental responsibility extends beyond individual behavior to institutional governance, public policy, community participation, and the protection of vulnerable populations. The principles of justice and public welfare are especially relevant because environmental hazards and resource shortages can disproportionately affect communities with limited economic and institutional support. Similarly, stewardship and moderation can provide ethical reasons for conservation, responsible consumption, and sustainable resource management. Environmental education can help translate these principles into practical activities through schools, mosques, universities, and community organizations. Nevertheless, the study emphasizes that religious teachings alone cannot resolve complex ecological problems. Their practical contribution depends on scientific evidence, effective environmental legislation, appropriate technology, institutional accountability, and the availability of realistic alternatives to environmentally damaging practices. Environmental initiatives must also be assessed according to measurable outcomes rather than their stated ethical intentions.

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