

## Why Does Conservation Fail Without Inner Transformation? Perspectives of Sufism and Ecology

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**Abstract** : This study examines Sufism (tasawuf) as a spiritual ethical framework for environmental conservation, arguing that the ecological crisis is also rooted in a crisis of meaning and moral consciousness. Employing a descriptive qualitative literature study, data were collected through systematic reviews of classical Sufi texts and contemporary works on Islam and ecology, and analyzed using close reading, thematic interpretation, and conceptual comparison. The findings highlight three main results: (1) Sufi ecology is grounded in the tauhid–khalifah–mizan framework, which interprets nature as sacred signs (ayat kauniyah), positions humans as trustees, and emphasizes balance; (2) inner transformation toward pro-environmental behavior operates through tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, and qana’ah, which regulate the ego-driven impulses underlying overconsumption and waste; and (3) relational ethics and practical implementation are reinforced by mahabbah–rahmah and internalization practices (muraqabah, gratitude, wara’), which can be institutionalized through education, faith-based communities, and sufficiency-oriented economic practices. The study implies that conservation efforts may become more sustainable when supported by spiritual character formation and social institutionalization of Sufi values. The originality lies in proposing an integrative model linking theological foundations, inner-change mechanisms, and social implementation pathways of eco-Sufism, offering an operational basis for environmentally oriented Sufi psychotherapy/Islamic counseling.

**Keywords** : *ecology; environmental conservation; sufism; tazkiyah al-nafs; tawhid.*

**Abstrak** : Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kontribusi tasawuf sebagai kerangka spiritual etik dalam konservasi lingkungan, dengan menempatkan krisis ekologi sebagai persoalan yang juga berakar pada krisis makna dan moral manusia. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi literatur; data dikumpulkan melalui penelusuran sistematis teks tasawuf klasik dan literatur kontemporer Islam ekologi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan pembacaan teks, interpretasi tematik, dan perbandingan konseptual. Temuan menunjukkan tiga hasil utama: (1) ekologi sufistik berpijak pada kerangka tauhid–khalifah–mizan yang memaknai alam sebagai ayat kauniyah bernilai intrinsik, menegaskan amanah manusia, dan menuntut pemeliharaan keseimbangan; (2) transformasi batin menuju perilaku pro-lingkungan dijelaskan melalui tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, dan qana’ah sebagai mekanisme pengendalian nafs yang memicu isrāf/tabdzīr; dan (3) etika relasional serta

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implementasi praktis diperkuat oleh mahabbah–rahmah dan praktik internalisasi (muraqabah, syukur, wara') yang dapat dilembagakan melalui pendidikan, komunitas, dan orientasi ekonomi berbasis kecukupan. Implikasi penelitian menegaskan bahwa konservasi dapat diperkokoh melalui intervensi pembinaan jiwa dan pelembagaan sosial nilai-nilai sufistik, sehingga perubahan perilaku ekologis lebih konsisten. Orisinalitas penelitian terletak pada penyusunan model integratif yang menghubungkan fondasi teologis, mekanisme transformasi batin, dan jalur implementasi sosial eco-sufism secara operasional bagi pengembangan psikoterapi sufistik/konseling Islam berbasis lingkungan.

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**Kata kunci** : ekologi; konservasi lingkungan; tasawuf; tazkiyah al-nafs; tauhid.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current global ecological crisis is increasingly evident through rising temperatures, extreme weather, and ecosystem degradation that have a direct impact on social life. The IPCC report confirms that human activities have "undeniably" caused global warming, with warming of about 1.1°C in the period 2011–2020 compared to the pre-industrial era (IPCC, 2023). This condition has continued in recent years, the World Meteorological Organization confirmed 2023 as the hottest year in observation records with global average temperatures around 1.45°C above preindustrial baseline (WMO, 2025), and WMO also confirmed 2024 as the hottest year, around 1.55°C above pre-industrial (WMO, 2025). At the same time, plastic pollution is a cross-regional problem, the United Nations Environment Programme reports that around 19-23 million tonnes of plastic waste leak into aquatic ecosystems each year (rivers, lakes, and seas), exacerbating habitat and life chain damage (UNEP, 2023).

This ecological phenomenon not only has environmental and economic dimensions, but also has a psycho-spiritual impact on society, especially on the younger generation. A global study on climate anxiety in children and adolescents (10 countries) shows high levels of anxiety; More than 45% of respondents reported that feelings related to the climate crisis negatively impacted daily life, and many rated the government's response inadequate (Hickman et al., 2021). This means that ecological crises can be read as a crisis of meaning and a crisis of inner peace (e.g., ecological anxiety, future insecurity, and emotional exhaustion), so it is relevant to be studied in the framework of sufistic psychotherapy and Islamic counseling that pays attention to the inner relationship of man, both with God, himself, and the universe, as the basis for the restoration of attitudes and behaviors.

A number of previous studies have discussed the relationship between Islam and the environment, but the trend is still fragmented in several focuses. First, the study of Islamic environmental ethics based on normative texts emphasizes theological foundations such as the mandate of the caliphate, the prohibition of damage (faḥṣah), and the ethics of proportional use of resources, including in the form of conceptual and ecological education (Albar, 2017; Izzi Dien, 2000; Ozdemir, 2003; Shihab, 2023). Second, the study of ecotheology and the critique of modernity highlight the roots of the ecological crisis in the change of worldview, the desacralization of nature, instrumental rationality, and the encouragement of modern economic expansion, so that the environmental crisis is understood as a crisis of the meaning and spirituality of civilization (Foster, 2002; Nasr, 1968; Ponting, 2007; White, 1967).

Third, the study of eco-sufism/ecology of Sufism more specifically links Sufistic concepts and praxis (e.g., tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, qana'ah, mahabbah, muraqabah) with the formation of ecological ethics, sustainability, and conservation movements based on religious communities (Abubakar, 2025; Ardina, 2025; Febriani, 2023; Munfarida, 2020; Rohman, 2023)

However, there are important gaps that have not been adequately explored. First, many studies are still dominant at the normative-philosophical level (what "should") and have not sufficiently explained the inner mechanisms (how change occurs) that link the concept of Sufism to changes in ecological behavior in a more operational way. Second, the study of eco-sufism often mentions sufistic practices (e.g. muraqabah, gratitude, wara', khalwah) but not many have formulated it as a clear path of psychotherapy/counseling intervention (logic of change, behavior targets, and outcome indicators) so its relevance to sufistic psychotherapy still needs to be strengthened. Third, the synthesis that connects the theological framework (tawhid-caliph-mizan), the mechanism of inner transformation (tazkiyah–zuhud–qana'ah), and social implementation (education–community–economy) is still rarely presented as a complete integrative model; This gap underlies the need for this research.

This study aims to overcome the limitations of previous studies that are still normative-philosophical by compiling a more operational conceptual mapping of the relationship between Sufism and environmental conservation. Specifically, this study (1) formulates the basic framework of sufistic ecology through the integration of monotheism–caliph–mizan as the theological-ethical foundation of the relationship between humans and nature; (2) explain the mechanism of inner transformation that connects the spirituality of Sufism with changes in ecological behavior through tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, and qana'ah as a way to control the impulse of consumption and waste; and (3) mapping relational ethics and practical implementation (mahabbah-rahmah, muraqabah, gratitude, wara') along with the arena of its application to education, community, and sustainable economic orientation. With this goal, this research is expected to make a new contribution in the form of an integrative model that can be the basis for the development of relevant sufistic psychotherapy/Islamic counseling approaches to respond to the psycho-spiritual impact of the ecological crisis while encouraging more consistent pro-environmental behavior.

This research departs from the argument that eco-sufism provides a relatively intact path of ecological change, because the theological framework (monotheism–caliph–mizan) forms a sacred view of nature and the mandate of human responsibility, and then the mechanisms of inner transformation (tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, qana'ah) control the impulse of nafs that trigger excessive consumption and waste, resulting in a more stable tendency to pro-environmental behavior (Munfarida, 2020; Nasr, 1996). Thus, the conceptual hypothesis of this study states that the stronger the internalization of the values of Sufism, the greater the chance of the formation of relational ethics (mahabbah-rahmah) and moral discipline (muraqabah, gratitude, wara') that reduce *isrāf/tabdzīr* and encourage conservation practices at the individual and community levels. This argument also predicts that the effectiveness of eco-sufism will increase when the values and practices do not stop at personal piety, but are institutionalized through education, religious community, and sufficiency-based economic orientation, so that ecological behavior changes become more consistent and long-term (Abubakar, 2025; Albar, 2017).

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis of this research is the concept, value, and practice of Sufism discussed in classical and contemporary literature, especially related to environmental ethics and conservation. The focus of the analysis is directed at how Sufism literature interprets nature (e.g., kauniyah verses), places the role of humans (caliph), and formulates the principle of balance (mizan), as well as how concepts such as tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, qana'ah, mahabbah, muraqabah, gratitude, and wara' are linked to changes in ecological behavior.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design with a literature study approach because the purpose of the research is to build conceptual understanding and map thematic patterns, not to measure the relationship of variables statistically. This approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth reading of Sufistic ideas and Islamic environmental ethical frameworks, while exploring the conceptual relationship between Sufism spirituality and environmental conservation (Izzi Dien, 2000; Ozdemir, 2003)

The data source is in the form of texts (secondary data) which includes classical Sufism works and contemporary literature on Islam and ecology. Classical literature includes, among others, works that represent the ethical and spirituality traditions of Islam (e.g., *al-Ghazali's Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*), while contemporary literature includes the study of eco-sufism, Islamic environmental ethics, and modernity's critique of ecological crises (S. H. Nasr, 1968, 1996; Ozdemir, 2003)

Data collection is carried out through systematic literature studies by browsing books and scientific articles relevant to the theme of Sufism and environmental conservation. The process includes identification of key literature, intensive reading, recording of key quotes/ideas, and grouping of sources based on thematic relevance (theological-ecological foundations, mechanisms of inner transformation, and social implementation (Abubakar, 2025; Albar, 2017).

Data analysis was carried out through text reading, thematic interpretation, and conceptual comparison. Each source is read to find key concepts, then coded into major themes; Furthermore, these themes are compared across literature to find patterns, common points, and relationships that explain how Sufism spirituality can shape pro-environmental ethics and behavior (Munfarida, 2020; S. H. Nasr, 1996; Rohman et al., 2024).

## 3. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of a literature review on the relationship between Sufism and environmental conservation. The research data is sourced from readings of classical Sufi texts and contemporary literature on Islamic environmental ethics and eco-sufism. The findings are presented thematically in line with the research objectives, namely explaining the conceptual basis of sufistic ecology, the mechanism of mental transformation of ecological behavior, as well as the form of relational ethics and the implications of its application.

### Basic Framework of Sufistic Ecology

Literature studies show that the ecological foundation in Sufism is repeatedly arranged through three conceptual nodes: monotheism (unity of reality), khalifah (mandate of responsibility), and mizan (cosmic balance). In the literature on Islamic environmental ethics and eco-sufism, the three serve as the basic framework that transforms the position of nature

from an "object of exploitation" to a "meaningful reality" that demands ethical-spiritual treatment (Izzi Dien, 2000; Ozdemir, 2003).

*First, Tawheed and the verse kauniyah: nature as a meaningful sign.* Literature data shows that monotheism is not only understood as a theological doctrine, but as a cosmological point of view: all reality is connected in the unity of origin and purpose, so that the relationship between man and nature is not purely utilitarian. Nature is understood as *āyāt Allāh/kauniyah* verses, the signs of God that are "valuable" and become a medium of recognition (*ma'rifah*) through contemplation (Nasr, 1996; Shihab, 2023). This framework is strengthened by the Qur'anic understanding that all natural entities have a "spiritual" dimension in glorifying God, even though they are not always understood by humans (QS. Al-Isrā' [17]: 44). At this point, the literature asserts that the desacralization of nature (the loss of the sacred view of nature) is one of the roots of the modern ecological crisis; as a result, nature is treated profanely, merely a commodity, and the legitimacy of exploitation is strengthened (Nasr, 1968, 1996). Thus, monotheism in the literature findings serves as a conceptual foundation to affirm the intrinsic value of nature and restore human-environmental relations towards respect and care (Foltz et al., 2003; Izzi Dien, 2000).

*Second, the Caliph: ethical mandate and ecological mandates* Literature findings also show that the concept of the Caliph is repeated as a moral mandate that positions humans not as the absolute owners of the earth, but as the bearers of the mandate. The most frequently put forward Qur'anic reference is QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30 about the placement of man as caliph on earth. In Islamic ecotheological literature, the caliphate is read as a stewardship responsibility that demands prudence, ecological justice, and damage avoidance (Izzi Dien, 2000; Ozdemir, 2003). Within the framework of Sufism, the concept of the caliphate is interpreted more inwardly: ecological mandate is understood as a consequence of the quality of the soul, when egoism and greed (dominance of *nafs*) are strengthened, the caliphate turns into a justification of domination; on the contrary, when divine consciousness is strengthened, the caliphate moves into protection and maintenance (Abubakar, 2025; Munfarida, 2020). Literature data also links ecological damage to "human actions" as the root of the problem, as affirmed in QS. Ar-Rūm: 41, so that conservation is understood as part of the moral-spiritual responsibility of humans to stop *fasād fi al-arḍ* (Munfarida, 2020).

*Third, Mizan: the principle of cosmic balance and harmony.* In addition to monotheism and the caliph, literature shows that the concept of *mizan* is present as a third principle that affirms that the universe runs in an order of balance, and ecological damage is understood as a form of disturbance of that harmony. In the framework of Islamic cosmology, balance is not just an ecological-technical concept, but a cosmic order that is full of spiritual meaning; Therefore, destroying nature is disrupting the order that contains divine wisdom. The Islamic ecology education literature also places "balance" as a normative value for building environmental ethics: the use of resources is limited by the principles of proportionality and responsibility (Albar, 2017). Thus, the data shows that *mizan* is the basis for the argument that conservation is not an optional option, but part of the maintenance of the order that should be maintained.

Thematically, the three nodes work as a single framework: monotheism provides the basis for the meaning and sacredness of nature, the caliph provides the basis for human mandates and responsibilities, and *mizan* provides the basis for moral boundaries in the form of balance. In this framework, environmental damage is not read as a purely technical problem, but as an expression of the breaking of monotheistic consciousness, deviation from

the caliphate's mandate, and violation of the principle of cosmic balance (Izzi Dien, 2000; Omar, 1995; Ozdemir, 2003).

To clarify the evidence and inter-thematic linkage, the literature findings are visualized in Table 1. This table shows the logical relationship between the concept of monotheism as the foundation of the meaning and sacredness of nature, the caliph as the mandate of ecological responsibility, and mizan as the principle of balance that is the moral limit in the use of resources.

**Table 1.** Literature Findings Matrix Sufistic Ecological Basic Framework

Finding node	Data/evidence from the literature	Emerging conceptual indicators	Ecological implications (derived results)
Tauhid & Kauniyah Verses	Nature is interpreted as <i>a verse</i> (sign) that holds spiritual meaning; the human-nature relationship is understood not to be purely utilitarian	The unity of reality; nature of intrinsic value; The desacralization of nature is seen as the root of the ecological crisis	Conservation is a form of reverence for the signs of God; Exploitation is understood as a deviation of perspective
Khalifah (amanah ekologis)	Humans are positioned as the bearers of the trust, not the absolute owners; The responsibility to protect the earth is made a moral mandate	Stewardship/trust; ethics of responsibility; Environmental damage related to human actions (façade)	Resource management must be fair and prudent; Conservation is understood as a moral-spiritual obligation
Mizan (cosmic balance)	Nature walks in an order of equilibrium; ecological damage is read as a disturbance of harmony that has moral-spiritual meaning	Cosmic harmony; proportionality; Ethical Limitations of Natural Use	Resist excessive exploitation; encourage moderation of resource use; Conservation as a Maintenance of Order
The interconnectedness of the three (integrative framework)	Tawheed gives sacred meaning; the caliph gave a mandate; Mizan gives limits, literature links the three to build environmental ethics	Value Framework: Meaning → Trust → Balance	Environmental damage is understood as a spiritual crisis (breaking monotheism), a moral crisis (ignoring trust), and a crisis of order (the destruction of mizan)

In short, the results of the literature review show that Sufism builds an ecological perspective through three main ideas: monotheism, caliph, and mizan. Tawhid makes humans see nature not just as a resource, but as a sign of God's greatness that has value and meaning.

The concept of the caliph emphasizes that humans are not the absolute owners of the earth, but trustees who are obliged to protect and care for it. Meanwhile, mizan teaches that nature has a balance that must be maintained, so excessive exploitation is seen as an act that destroys harmony. Therefore, environmental damage in this perspective is not only considered a technical problem, but also a sign of a weakening of human spiritual awareness and moral responsibility to God's trust.

From the thematic data in this sub-chapter, four main patterns emerge. First, the literature consistently starts environmental ethics from *a theological-cosmological framework*, rather than from technical considerations. That is, ecological discussions are placed first on a change in perspective: nature is seen as *a kauniyah verse* and part of the unity of monotheistic reality, so that nature has intrinsic value and is not legally treated solely as a commodity. Second, the concept of the caliphate is repeated as the center of normative argumentation that affirms the "human status" not as an owner, but as a trustee; this pattern makes human relations, nature shift from domination to responsibility. Third, the literature presents mizan as a "moral limit" that directs the way in which resources are used so that they remain proportionate and do not exceed their carrying capacity; ecological crisis is read as a disturbance of cosmic harmony as well as an ethical violation. Fourth, these three knots are almost always present integratively: monotheism gives meaning and sacredness of nature, caliph gives moral mandates, while mizan gives the principle of balance; This framework is then used to interpret environmental damage as a spiritual-moral crisis (H. Nasr, 2008; Ozdemir, 2003).

Based on these patterns, Sufism literature and Islamic environmental ethics tend to build conservation as a project of values and awareness: ecological change is understood to depart from a change in the way of interpreting nature (tauhid), a change in the position of humans (caliph), and an awareness of boundaries and balance (mizan).

### **The Mechanism of Inner Transformation into Ecological Behavior**

Literature studies show that Sufism does not stop at the normative framework (monotheism–caliph–mizan), but also provides a mechanism of inner transformation that explains how spiritual values can be transformed into concrete ecological behaviors. The pattern of findings confirms that the main source of modern environmental damage is often associated with the dominance of uneducated nafs: greed, hedonism, and the unfettered consumption drive that encourages the exploitation of nature (Nasr, 1968, 1996; Munfarida, 2019). Within this framework, ecological solutions are understood to require inner therapy through the core concepts of Sufism such as tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, and qana'ah, which serve as internal devices to control consumptive impulses and form a moderate lifestyle.

Tazkiyah al-nafs: purification of the soul as a control of the impulse to consummate. Literature findings show that tazkiyah al-nafs is positioned as the process of educating the soul from destructive traits, such as greed, selfishness, and domination of desire, which in the context of ecology are manifested in the behavior of *isrāf* (excess) and *tabdzīr* (wastefulness). The framework of the Qur'ani that is often used as a foothold is the principle that human success is related to the ability to purify the soul (QS. al-Shams [91]: 9–10). In the Sufistic tradition, tazkiyah is understood as an exercise in self-awareness and self-discipline that shifts the orientation of life from the satisfaction of desires to ethical-spiritual obedience. The literature of eco-sufism places this process as the foundation of pro-environmental behavior because nafs control has direct implications for the reduction of overconsumption and resource exploitation.

**Zuhud:** the release of material attachment as a criticism of consumerism Literature data also shows that zuhud in Sufism is not interpreted as a total rejection of the world, but rather the release of mental attachment to materialism. This pattern is important because the literature associates ecological crises with a culture of consumerism that normalizes the accumulation and unlimited use of resources (Foster, 2002). Zuhud is understood as an inner mechanism to reduce dependence on material possessions and status; As a result, consumption patterns become simpler and needs are limited to essentials. Classical Sufism literature places this simplicity as part of moral development, while contemporary literature links it to a lifestyle with a low ecological footprint.

**Qana'ah:** the orientation of sufficiency and moderation as an ethics of resource use In line with zuhud, literature reviews show that qana'ah (feeling sufficient) plays a role as a principle that stabilizes needs and controls the impulse to "never be satisfied" that becomes the engine of consumptive behavior. The findings emphasize that qana'ah forms a moderate consumption ethic (i'tidāl), so that the use of natural resources takes place more proportionately and does not exceed needs. In the context of sustainability, qana'ah is positioned as a mechanism for the formation of economical habitus, energy use efficiency, and waste reduction, which is conceptually in line with conservation goals (Munfarida, 2020; S. H. Nasr, 1996; Rohman, 2023).

**Synthesis of mechanisms:** from inner transformation to changes in ecological behavior Overall, the literature data show a mechanistic flow: when tazkiyah al-nafs succeeds in controlling the impulse of nafs, and then strengthened by zuhud (release of attachments) and qana'ah (orientation of sufficiency), there is a shift in orientation from "to possess and consume" to "use in moderation and keep". The implications appear in ecological behaviors such as avoiding waste, limiting consumption, being careful in the use of resources, and resisting exploitation that damages the carrying capacity of the environment. Thus, the literature places Sufism as an ecological approach that is internal and transformative, complementing external approaches such as regulation and technology.

**Tabel 2.** Matriks Temuan Literatur Mekanisme Transformasi Batin menuju

Concept/theme of findings	Data/evidence from the literature (what the sources indicate)	Inner transformation mechanism	Indicators of ecological behavior (derived results)
<b>Tazkiyah al-nafs (penyucian jiwa)</b>	Ecological damage is associated with the dominance of nafs (greed, selfishness, hedonism) that drives isrāf/tabdzīr; Tazkiyah is positioned as a mental therapy for mengendalikan dorongan tersebut	Self-regulation; Spiritual Discipline; control of consumption impulses	Reduce overconsumption; Avoid waste; choose to taste
<b>Zuhud (moderation/release of attachment)</b>	Zuhud is understood not to reject the world, but not to be bound to	Zuhud is understood not to reject the	Simple lifestyle; resist the impulse of ownership;



Concept/theme of findings	Data/evidence from the literature (what the sources indicate)	Inner transformation mechanism	Indicators of ecological behavior (derived results)
	matter; criticism of the culture of consumerism that accelerates the exploitation of nature	world, but not to be bound to matter; criticism of the culture of consumerism that accelerates the exploitation of nature	Minimum consumption
<b>Qana'ah (feeling enough)</b>	Qana'ah emerges as a principle of sufficiency that stabilizes desires; Literature links it to moderation (i'tidāl) and the proportionate use of favors	Sufficiency orientation; moderation; "Never Satisfied"	Resource efficiency; waste reduction; consumption as needed
<b>Isrāf &amp; tabdzīr (excessive behavior) as a target for change</b>	The literature shows a relationship: uncontrollable nafs → excessive consumption → exploitation of nature; Tazkiyah–Zuhud–Qana'ah becomes a series of mental transformations that change the orientation of life	Moral-spiritual correction; Internalization of Self-Control	Anti-boring; resist destructive behavior; Choosing eco-friendly behavior
<b>Eco-sufi mechanistic flow (concept integration)</b>	The literature shows a relationship: uncontrollable nafs → excessive consumption → exploitation of nature; Tazkiyah–Zuhud–Qana'ah becomes a series of mental transformations that change the orientation of life	Moral-spiritual correction; Internalization of Self-Control	Reduction of ecological footprint; prudent use of resources; Pro-Conservation Behavior

Table 2 shows that the literature of eco-sufism positions ecological problems as a consequence of uncontrolled impulses, especially in the form of overconsumption and waste. Therefore, tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, and qana'ah are not only discussed as spiritual concepts, but as mechanisms for the formation of self-control and sufficiency orientation that have direct implications for environmentally friendly behavior.

From the thematic data in this sub-chapter, four main patterns emerge. First, the literature consistently places ecological problems as a consequence of inner problems,

especially the dominance of nafs that give rise to consumptive and exploitative behavior; therefore the goal of change is not only the external system, but also the development of character and the control of internal impulses (Nasr, 1968, 1996; Munfarida, 2019). Second, the concept of tazkiyah al-nafs appears as the most central mechanism and the "entrance" of change, because it is understood as a process of self-regulation that suppresses *isrāf* and *tabdzīr* as a concrete form of non-ecological behavior (Ghazali, 2005; Munfarida, 2019). Third, the literature shows a multi-layered pattern of reinforcement: after self-control is built through tazkiyah, behavioral changes are reinforced by *zuhud* (release of attachment to matter) and *qana'ah* (sufficiency orientation), so that consumption is moved from the motive of desire to the limit of necessity (Nasr, 1996; Rohman, 2023, 2024). Fourth, literature findings tend to frame Sufism as an internal and long-term ecological approach: behavioral change is considered more durable when it is built through inner discipline, not just through rules or social pressure (Munfarida, 2019; Rohman, 2023).

Based on this pattern, the provisional conclusion from the data of this sub-chapter is that the eco-sufism literature views ecological transformation as a gradual process: the improvement of mental orientation (tazkiyah) followed by the simplification of lifestyle (*zuhud*) and the stabilization of needs (*qana'ah*), which together lead to a reduction in waste, restriction of consumption, and prudence in the use of resources.

The significance of these findings is that Sufism provides a more "mechanistic" explanatory model of how spirituality can affect environmental behavior. If in the first sub-chapter eco-sufism gives a framework of values (monotheism–caliph–mizan), then in this sub-chapter the literature shows a "bridge" from value to action: environmental damage is mapped as a behavioral symptom (excessive consumption, waste, exploitation) that comes from unmanaged mental impulses (Nasr, 1996; Munfarida, 2019). Thus, tazkiyah al-nafs, *zuhud*, and *qana'ah* can be understood as devices that improve the root of behavior, namely self-regulation and the orientation of needs, which are directly relevant to conservation efforts.

These findings add to the knowledge of the phenomenon being studied in two ways. First, he reinforces the argument that conservation is not enough to rely solely on external approaches, since consumption and exploitation behaviors are also underpinned by internal "never enough" structures of desire and culture; Sufism offers a tool to intervene in this dimension through the formation of the soul (Ghazali, 2005; Nasr, 1996). Second, these findings open up a stronger contribution space for Sufistic psychotherapy journals, because the concepts of tazkiyah, *zuhud*, and *qana'ah* can be read as a process of forming self-control, strengthening meaning, and moderate life discipline that has the potential to be the basis for the design of counseling modules or spirituality-based ecological character education (Rohman, 2023, 2024). In other words, the data support the conclusion that eco-sufism is not only an ethical discourse, but also provides an inner coaching mechanism that can produce more consistent pro-environmental behaviors.

### **Relational Ethics & Practical Implementation**

Literature studies show that sufistic ecology not only moves in the realm of conceptual frameworks (monotheism–caliph–mizan) and mechanisms of inner transformation (tazkiyah–*zuhud*–*qana'ah*), but also forms relational ethics and implementation paths that can be practiced in social life. In this theme, the literature affirms that man's relationship with nature is driven by affective-spiritual orientations in the form of *mahabbah* (universal love) and *rahmah* (affection), which expand the scope of ethics from interhuman beings to concern for

all creation. This meaning is supported by the cosmological view that nature has a spiritual dimension as God's creation and therefore deserves respect, not being treated as an inanimate object that is free to be exploited (Ozdemir, 2003; Schimmel, 1975).

Mahabbah-rahmah as the basis of relational ethics towards nature. Literature data shows that mahabbah in Sufism is understood as love that departs from monotheism and does not stop at the vertical relationship between man and God, but radiates to a horizontal relationship with all creatures. In this framework, caring for nature is positioned as an expression of love for creation, while the destruction of nature is understood as a contradiction to the ethics of love and compassion. Eco-sufism literature emphasizes that when human-nature relations are built on mahabbah/rahmah, conservation actions are not solely based on the calculation of economic benefits, but based on ecological respect and empathy (Ardina, 2025; Munfarida, 2020).

Sufistic practice as an instrument of internalization of ecological ethics Literature findings also show that such relational ethics are strengthened by sufistic practices that function as "internalization" of values. First, muraqabah (awareness of God's supervision) emerged as a mechanism that formed prudence before acting, including in the use of natural resources. This awareness transforms ecological action from a mere rational choice to a part of moral-spiritual accountability. Second, gratitude is read not only as a speech, but as a proportionate use of favors; in an ecological context, gratitude suppresses waste and fosters a frugal attitude towards water, energy, and resources. Third, wara' is positioned as a principle of moral prudence that makes individuals consider the ecological impact of each action and resist excessive exploitation. Fourth, khalwah (self-limitation) in certain literature is understood as an exercise of release from the impulse of materialism that indirectly reduces consumptive activity and ecological footprint (Al-Ghazali, 2005).

Recurring implementation arenas: education, community, and sufistic economics. At the implementation level, the literature data shows the three most frequently emerging implementation arenas. First, spiritual ecology education that instills sacred awareness of nature through habituation, simple living practices, and integration of religious reflection on the environment in Islamic educational institutions (Albar, 2017; H. Nasr, 2008). Second, sufistic green communities, such as tarekats, dhikr assemblies, or spirituality-based pesantren that convert values into collective actions such as tree planting, environmentally friendly agriculture, water conservation, and waste management as part of social worship ethics (Rohman et al., 2024). Third, a sufistic economic model that emphasizes sufficiency (qana'ah), benefit, and intergenerational responsibility, so that production-consumption is directed to be in harmony with ecological carrying capacity and does not encourage unlimited accumulation (Abubakar, 2025; Foster, 2002).

Overall, the data show that eco-sufism provides a praxis pathway: mahabbah/rahmah builds affective motivation, muraqabah–gratitude–wara'–khalwah forms habits and moral control, while education–community–economics becomes a social space to institutionalize pro-environmental behavior. Thus, conservation is not positioned as an additional project, but rather as part of a spiritual discipline and social worship that can be revived in various levels of life.

**Table 3.** Matrix of Literature Findings of Relational Ethics & Practical Implementation of Sufistic Ecology

Cluster findings	Data/evidence from the literature (summary)	Data/evidence from the literature (summary)	Conservation implications/actions
Relational ethics: mahabbah–rahmah	Sufistic love and compassion extend ethics to the entire creation; Nature is revered for its spiritual value	Ecological empathy & non-utilitarian moral motivation	The urge to take care of nature, protect creatures, resist exploitation
Internalization practice: muraqabah gratitude wara' (± khalwah)	Sufistic practices form awareness, prudence, and anti-extravagance in daily actions	Self-Awareness; consumption moderation; The Principle of Prudence	Save resources, reduce waste, resist overexploitation
Implementation arena: education community sufistic economics	The literature emphasizes the institutionalization of values through educational institutions, dhikr/tarekat/pesantren communities, and sufficiency economics orientation	Collective habitus & social reinforcement	Institutional/community-based conservation programs; Moderate consumption-production
Synthesis of praxic pathways	Ethics motivate, practice forms habits, social arena strengthens consistency	Motivasi → habitus → institusi	Conservation is understood as a social worship and sustainable practice

In summary, the results of the study show that Sufism encourages environmental conservation not only through rules or logic of benefits, but through the inner relationship of humans with nature. The values of mahabbah and rahmah make humans motivated to take care of nature because of love and affection for God's creation. This value is then reinforced by Sufistic practices such as muraqabah, gratitude, and wara' (as well as in certain contexts khalwah) that train awareness, prudence, and non-extravagance. In order not to stop at the individual level, the literature also emphasizes that these values and practices can be applied through education, community, and economic orientation that emphasizes sufficiency, so that conservation actions become more real and sustainable.

From the data in this sub-chapter, four main patterns emerge. First, the literature shows a tendency that conservation in eco-sufism is largely supported by affective motivations: mahabbah-rahmah is used to build a deeper ecological concern and does not rely on the calculation of profits alone. Second, there is a pattern that ethical values are not considered sufficient without internalization tools; Practices such as muraqabah, gratitude, and wara' are therefore seen as habituation mechanisms that form prudence, anti-wastefulness, and moral control in the use of resources. Third, the literature tends to associate the effectiveness of behavioral change with social-institutional reinforcement; Education, religious communities, and sufficiency-based economic models serve as spaces that stabilize values into collective habits. Fourth, there is a relatively consistent pattern of praxis: eco-sufism moves from

motivation (love/rahmah), to registration/self-supervision through practice, then to sustainability through social institutionalization (S. H. Nasr, 2007; Rohman, 2023).

Based on this pattern, the interim conclusion from the data of this sub-chapter is that eco-sufism offers a form of conservation that is relational and pragmatic: it combines the motivation of love, inner discipline, and institutional support so that ecological action does not stop at discourse, but becomes the habit of individuals and social movements.

The main significance of these findings is that Sufism provides a dimension that is often lacking in modern conservation approaches, namely the affective and spiritual dimensions as a source of long-term commitment. If conservation is driven only by rules or fear of crisis, behavior is often unstable; Meanwhile, literature findings suggest that mahabbah-rahmah can be a "moral energy" that makes ecological actions seen as valuable as part of worship and compassion for creation. The practice of muraqabah–gratitude–wara' adds another important aspect: it explains how value can become action through the exercise of awareness and prudence, so that conservation does not depend on external control alone.

On the implementation side, these findings enrich the knowledge of the phenomenon being studied because it shows that eco-sufism has a realistic institutional path: education shapes perspectives and habits; communities strengthen compliance through collective example and practice; Meanwhile, sufistic economics directs the consumption-production pattern to be in harmony with the carrying capacity of nature. Thus, the data of this sub-chapter support the conclusion that sufistic ecology is not just a normative idea, but a model of behavioral and social change that can be operationalized from the individual to the community level. It also reinforces the article's position in the context of Syifa al-Qulub: Sufistic practices can be understood as soul-building instruments that shape pro-environmental behavior more consistently.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, this study produced three main findings on how Sufism can contribute to environmental conservation. First, Sufistic ecology is built on the basic framework of monotheism–caliph-mizan which changes the way of looking at nature: nature is understood as *a kauniyah verse* with intrinsic value, humans are positioned as trustees (caliphs), and human-nature relations must be maintained in the principle of balance (mizan). This framework places ecological damage not only as a technical problem, but also as a crisis of spiritual awareness and moral responsibility.

Second, the findings suggest a pathway of mental transformation mechanisms that bridge spiritual values to ecological behavior. The literature emphasizes that environmentally destructive behavior often stems from the dominance of nafs that encourages overconsumption and waste. Therefore, the concepts of tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, and qana'ah are understood as soul-building devices that form self-control, limit desires, and direct a lifestyle to sufficiency. This mechanism has implications for reducing *isrāf/tabdzīr*, limiting consumption, and prudence in the use of resources (Al-Ghazali, 2005; Rohman, 2023; Rohman et al., 2024).

Third, this study found that eco-sufism also contains dimensions of relational ethics and practical implementation. The value of mahabbah-rahmah expands ethics to concern for all creation, while sufistic practices such as muraqabah, gratitude, and wara' (as well as in certain contexts *khalwah*) serve as instruments of internalizing values so that they become ecological habits. At the social level, the literature shows three recurring implementation arenas, namely spiritual ecology education, a Sufism-based green community, and a sufistic economic

orientation that emphasizes sufficiency and benefit. These three arenas make conservation easier to practice collectively and sustainably (Albar, 2017; Foster, 2002).

Overall, this summary of results shows that Sufism offers a relatively complete ecological contribution: starting from the framework of meaning (tauhid–khalifah–mizan), the mechanism of inner development (tazkiyah, zuhud, qana'ah), to the practical path through relational ethics and the institutionalization of conservation actions in education, communities, and the economy.

The results of this research appear to be so because Sufism works as a complete system: monotheism–caliph–mizan forms a framework of meaning that sanctifies nature and affirms human mandate, then tazkiyah–zuhud–qana'ah arranges the inner impulse (nafs) which becomes the source of excessive consumption, so that when the inner orientation changes and is strengthened by relational ethics (mahabbah-rahmah) and internalization practices (muraqabah, gratitude, wara'), More cautious and conservative ecological behavior becomes a logical consequence and is easier to institutionalize in education, communities, and the economy.

The findings of this study are in line with previous studies that affirm that the modern environmental crisis is related to the desacralization of nature and a modern perspective that separates ecological reality from the spiritual dimension; Nasr, for example, sees the ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis born from the loss of the sacred view of nature (Nasr, 1990). The results of this article are also consistent with Islamic and ecological studies that place Qur'anic concepts such as the caliphate and the ethics of human responsibility towards the earth as the moral foundation of conservation. In the context of the local literature on Sufism and environmental ethics, these findings strengthen the argument that Sufism values can shape an ethical orientation towards nature and encourage pro-environmental behavior.

In contrast, many previous studies tend to stop at the normative-theological level (basing ecological obligations on verses, the concept of the caliph, and the prohibition of corruption) or on philosophical criticism of modernity, while this article adds emphasis on a more operational path of inner transformation, namely how the concept of Sufism (tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, qana'ah) can be understood as a mechanism for the formation of self-control that suppresses *isrāf/tabdzīr* and changes consumption patterns as the root of ecological pressure (Al-Ghazali, 2005; Munfarida, 2020; Rohman et al., 2024). In addition, compared to some eco-sufism studies that focus on cosmology or metaphysics, this article highlights the bridge of praxis through relational ethics (mahabbah-rahmah) and internalization tools (muraqabah, gratitude, wara') and places implementation in three concrete arenas, education, community, and economy, as a path for institutionalizing conservation (Abubakar, 2025; Albar, 2017).

Thus, the novelty of this article lies in the preparation of an integrative model that connects the three layers of Sufism's contribution, (1) the framework of meaning (monotheism–caliph–mizan), (2) the mechanism of behavior change (tazkiyah–zuhud–qana'ah), and (3) the path of social implementation (relational ethics + institutionalization through education/community/economy), so that eco-sufism does not only appear as an ethical-theological discourse, but as a more complete framework for reading and intervening in ecological behavior.

Ideologically and socially, the findings of this study show that environmental conservation in the perspective of Sufism is not just a technocratic agenda, but part of the formation of meaning, morality, and collective spirituality: nature is repositioned as a valuable reality (*kauniyah* verse) that demands trust (caliph) and the maintenance of balance (mizan), so that ecological actions acquire religious legitimacy as worship and ethical responsibility

(Ozdemir, 2003). Historically, these results reinforce the critique of modernity that desacralizes nature and normalizes unlimited consumption, while offering a counter framework based on tazkiyah–zuhud–qana'ah that organizes the inner impulse and consumption culture from its roots (Foster, 2002; S. H. Nasr, 1968, 1997) His main contribution to a broader understanding is to make it clear that ecological crises can be read as crises of life orientation and character formation, so that eco-sufism provides a conceptual-practical bridge from values to behavior and to social institutionalization (education, community, economy) to produce more lasting ecological changes.

The findings of this study function positively because eco-sufism provides a more stable basis for meaning and motivation for conservation, through tauhid-khalifah-mizan and tazkiyah-zuhud-qana'ah which suppress excessive consumption, but risks becoming a normative discourse if it is not accompanied by a measurable implementation strategy or is misunderstood as if it is enough to replace structural reform and environmental policy enforcement. Therefore, the recommended action plan is to integrate spiritual ecology in Islamic education (curriculum + habituation), mobilize religious communities for conservation programs based on social worship, direct anti-israf/tabdzīr campaigns on changes in consumption behavior, encourage a sustainable local economy based on benefits, and establish evaluation indicators (waste, water/energy, planted trees, change in habits) so that the impact can be measured.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that environmental conservation in the perspective of Sufism cannot be separated from the transformation of human meaning and mind: monotheism–caliph-mizan forms a basic framework that positions nature as *a kauniyah* verse of intrinsic value, humans as trustees, and balance (mizan) as the moral limit of resource utilization. On top of this framework, the literature shows that ecological change becomes more possible when supported by the mechanism of soul development through tazkiyah al-nafs, zuhud, and qana'ah that suppresses isrāf/tabdzīr and directs the lifestyle towards sufficiency, then strengthened by relational ethics (mahabbah-rahmah) and internalized practices (muraqabah, gratitude, wara') that can be institutionalized through education, community, and sustainable economic orientation.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in the preparation of an integrative model of eco-sufism that connects three important layers in succession: (1) the theological-ecological framework (tauhid-khalifah-mizan), (2) the mechanism of inner transformation into behavior (tazkiyah-zuhudqana'ah), and (3) the path of praxis through relational ethics and the arena of social implementation (education, community, economy). This model enriches the discourse of Sufism and conservation by emphasizing that Sufism is not only an ethical discourse, but also a character building tool that has the potential to produce more consistent pro-environmental behavior.

The limitations of this study are that it is based on a literature study, so it has not empirically tested the extent to which sufistic values and practices actually change ecological behavior in the context of a particular community and has not provided quantitative indicators of conservation impacts. Therefore, further research is recommended to conduct field studies on Islamic boarding schools, dhikr assemblies, or tarekat communities; develop and test eco-sufism education/counseling modules; and measure behavior change and its impact through evaluative design (e.g. pre-post, comparative case studies, or mixed methods) to make this conceptual framework more tested and operational.

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