

Ecospiritual Consciousness and Environmental Ethics: An Ecosufi Reading of the Selected Works of Ibn Arabi, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, and Ahmad Tohari

Suman Devi¹, Sonia Sumbria²

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Lovely Professional University, Punjab.

²Research scholar, Dept. of English, Lovely Professional University, Punjab.

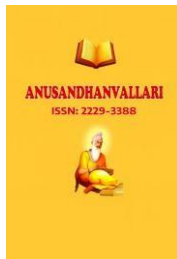
Abstract: As environmental crises continue to challenge anthropocentric worldviews, Ecosufism emerges as a compelling ecospiritual framework that redefines the relationship between humanity, nature, and the Divine. Drawing upon ecocritical theory and Sufi philosophy, this study explores the concept of environmental ethics in the selected works of Ibn Arabi, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, and Ahmad Tohari. The paper examines how these writers challenge the perception of nature as a resource for human exploitation by presenting it as a sacred manifestation of the Divine. Ibn Arabi's doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being) establishes the philosophical foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of God, humanity, and the natural world. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee expands this vision through spiritual ecology, arguing that the ecological crisis originates in humanity's separation from the sacred dimension of nature. Likewise, Ahmad Tohari's literary works depict the ethical and ecological consequences of disrupting the harmony between humans and the environment. Through a comparative textual analysis, the study argues that environmental conservation is represented not merely as a scientific or political concern but as a spiritual and ethical responsibility. By foregrounding ecospiritual consciousness, these writers advocate an ecological worldview founded on reverence, interconnectedness, compassion, and environmental stewardship. The study contributes to contemporary ecocritical scholarship by demonstrating that Ecosufism provides an alternative framework for understanding environmental sustainability through spiritual consciousness and ethical engagement with the natural world.

Keywords: Ecosufism; Environmental Ethics; Ecospiritual Consciousness; Ecocriticism; Sufism; Comparative Literature.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented ecological crisis characterized by climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, and the rapid depletion of natural resources. While scientific and technological interventions remain essential for addressing these challenges, they alone cannot transform the ethical attitudes that have contributed to environmental degradation. Increasingly, scholars argue that the ecological crisis is also a moral and spiritual crisis rooted in anthropocentric thinking, which views nature primarily as a resource for human exploitation rather than as a living, interconnected system (Garrard 5; Heise 8). This realization has encouraged interdisciplinary approaches that integrate environmental ethics with religious and philosophical traditions to promote more sustainable relationships between humans and the natural world.

Among these approaches, Ecosufism has emerged as a significant ecospiritual framework that combines the ecological principles of environmental conservation with the spiritual teachings of Sufism. Grounded in the Islamic mystical tradition, Ecosufism understands the natural world as a sacred manifestation of the Divine, where every element of creation reflects God's presence and wisdom. Rather than separating humanity from nature, it emphasizes interconnectedness, compassion, stewardship, and ethical responsibility toward all forms of life. In this perspective, caring for the environment becomes not merely an ecological obligation but also a



spiritual practice rooted in reverence for creation. Such a worldview challenges anthropocentric assumptions by recognizing the intrinsic value of the non-human world and advocating a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

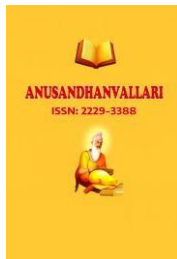
The philosophical foundations of Ecosufism can be traced to the writings of the renowned Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi, whose doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being) conceives all existence as interconnected through the Divine. This spiritual vision has been reinterpreted in contemporary environmental thought by writers such as Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, whose concept of spiritual ecology emphasizes humanity's responsibility to restore its sacred relationship with the Earth. Similarly, the Indonesian novelist Ahmad Tohari incorporates ecological consciousness into his literary works by portraying the intimate relationship between rural communities, spirituality, and the natural environment. Although these writers belong to different historical periods and cultural contexts, they collectively present nature as a sacred entity that deserves respect rather than domination.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined environmental ethics through the lenses of ecocriticism, eco-theology, and environmental humanities. However, comparatively little attention has been devoted to Ecosufism as a literary and philosophical framework for interpreting ecological consciousness across diverse literary traditions. Existing studies frequently discuss Ibn Arabi's mysticism, Vaughan-Lee's spiritual ecology, and Ahmad Tohari's environmental imagination independently, while their shared ecospiritual vision remains insufficiently explored. Addressing this gap, the present study undertakes a comparative literary analysis of their selected works to examine how Ecosufism redefines the relationship between humanity, nature, and the Divine.

Drawing upon ecocritical theory and Sufi philosophy, this paper argues that the selected texts promote environmental ethics through the principles of interconnectedness, sacred ecology, and spiritual responsibility. By foregrounding ecospiritual consciousness, these works challenge anthropocentric worldviews and propose an alternative ecological paradigm in which environmental sustainability is inseparable from ethical and spiritual awareness. Consequently, the study contributes to the expanding discourse on environmental humanities by demonstrating the continuing relevance of Ecosufism in responding to contemporary ecological crises.

The growing field of environmental humanities has increasingly emphasized the need to integrate ecological concerns with ethical and spiritual perspectives. While ecocriticism has primarily examined the representation of nature and environmental crises in literature, recent scholarship argues that ecological sustainability also requires a transformation of human consciousness. Greg Garrard observes that environmental criticism questions anthropocentric ideologies that privilege human interests over the intrinsic value of the natural world (Garrard 5). Similarly, Lawrence Buell maintains that environmental texts reshape readers' ethical imagination by encouraging responsibility toward the more-than-human world (Buell 2). Extending this discourse, religious and philosophical traditions offer alternative ecological paradigms in which nature is regarded not as a commodity but as a sacred presence. Within the Islamic tradition, Sufi philosophy contributes a distinctive ecological vision by emphasizing humility, interconnectedness, and stewardship rather than domination. Scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr argue that modern ecological degradation reflects the loss of humanity's sacred vision of the cosmos, making environmental recovery inseparable from spiritual renewal (Nasr 3). Contemporary thinkers like Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee further develop this perspective through the concept of spiritual ecology, asserting that healing the Earth requires the restoration of humanity's inner relationship with the living world. These theoretical perspectives provide an appropriate framework for interpreting the selected texts as literary explorations of environmental ethics grounded in spiritual consciousness, where ecological responsibility emerges from reverence, compassion, and recognition of the sacredness of all creation.

Ibn Arabi's writings provide one of the earliest philosophical foundations for contemporary Ecosufism by presenting nature as a sacred manifestation of the Divine rather than a material entity existing solely for human use. His doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being) dissolves the dualism between the Creator and creation,



emphasizing that every element of the universe reflects the Divine presence. In *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn Arabi writes, “The whole cosmos is the self-manifestation (tajalli) of God” (90). This metaphysical vision challenges anthropocentric assumptions by recognizing the intrinsic value of all forms of existence. Nature, therefore, is not passive or inferior but participates in the continuous revelation of the Divine, demanding reverence and ethical responsibility from humanity.

In *The Meccan Revelations*, Ibn Arabi further develops this vision by arguing that the universe functions as a living system sustained through divine wisdom and balance. He states, “There is nothing in existence but that it glorifies God in its own language” (112). This assertion echoes the Qur’anic understanding that every aspect of creation possesses spiritual significance and should be approached with humility rather than domination. From an Ecosufi perspective, environmental destruction represents not only ecological imbalance but also a disruption of humanity’s spiritual relationship with the Divine manifested in nature. Consequently, protecting the natural world becomes an ethical obligation grounded in spiritual consciousness rather than merely a practical necessity.

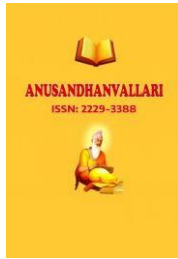
Ibn Arabi also redefines the position of human beings within creation by rejecting absolute human superiority. Instead of granting humanity unrestricted authority over nature, he emphasizes stewardship, accountability, and coexistence. Human beings are entrusted with safeguarding the harmony of creation rather than exploiting it for material gain. This ethical vision closely aligns with contemporary environmental thought, which advocates sustainability, reciprocity, and respect for ecological systems. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr observes, the environmental crisis is fundamentally “a spiritual crisis” arising from humanity’s estrangement from the sacred order of existence (3). Ibn Arabi’s philosophy anticipates this argument by locating ecological responsibility within spiritual awareness and moral discipline.

Through this ecospiritual worldview, Ibn Arabi offers a profound critique of anthropocentrism and materialism. His writings propose that the restoration of ecological balance depends upon the restoration of humanity’s relationship with the Divine, where love for God is inseparable from respect for creation. Read through the lens of Ecosufism, his works transform environmental ethics into a spiritual practice founded on unity, compassion, and reverence for the interconnectedness of all existence.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee expands the ecological vision of Sufism by presenting environmental degradation as a manifestation of humanity’s spiritual estrangement from the Earth. In *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, he argues that the ecological crisis cannot be resolved solely through scientific or political measures because it originates in a fractured relationship between human beings and the sacred. He writes, “The environmental crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis” (3). This statement shifts the environmental debate from material concerns to spiritual consciousness, suggesting that ecological healing begins with inner transformation and the recovery of reverence for nature.

A central theme in Vaughan-Lee’s writings is the sacredness of the Earth. Rather than viewing nature as an external object, he portrays it as a living presence that possesses its own spiritual reality. He observes, “The Earth is a living spiritual being, and our relationship with her is a sacred covenant” (15). This perspective challenges anthropocentric notions of ownership and exploitation by emphasizing mutual dependence and ethical responsibility. Nature is therefore understood as a partner in existence rather than a passive resource for human consumption.

Vaughan-Lee further argues that modern civilization has silenced the spiritual voice of nature through excessive materialism and consumerism. In *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul*, he remarks, “We have forgotten the sacredness of the world, and because of this forgetting, we have forgotten our own soul” (28). The ecological crisis thus reflects not only environmental destruction but also the erosion of humanity’s spiritual consciousness. Through this Ecosufi vision, Vaughan-Lee proposes that environmental ethics must be grounded in compassion, humility, and the recognition of the Earth as a sacred manifestation of the Divine. His writings



ultimately redefine ecological conservation as an act of spiritual responsibility, where caring for the natural world becomes inseparable from caring for the human soul.

Ahmad Tohari's literary works present nature as an integral part of human existence, where ecological harmony is inseparable from spiritual and cultural values. Rooted in the rural landscape of Indonesia, his fiction portrays the environment not merely as a physical setting but as a living presence that shapes the identity, beliefs, and survival of local communities. Through an Ecosufi perspective, Tohari emphasizes that human well-being depends upon maintaining a respectful and balanced relationship with the natural world.

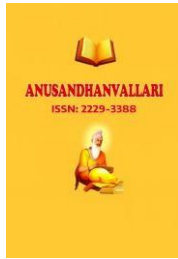
In *The Dancer* (Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk), the village of Dukuh Paruk exists in close harmony with its surrounding forests, fields, and rivers. The landscape functions as a source of livelihood, cultural memory, and spiritual identity. Describing the intimate connection between the villagers and their environment, Tohari writes, "The people of Dukuh Paruk lived as one with the land that sustained them" (21). This close relationship reflects the Ecosufi belief that nature is a sacred trust rather than a commodity for exploitation. However, ecological balance is gradually disrupted by social conflict, poverty, and human greed, illustrating how environmental destruction is closely linked to moral and spiritual decline.

Similarly, in *Kubah* (The Dome), Tohari presents nature as a space of spiritual renewal and ethical reflection. The protagonist's return to his village symbolizes not only personal redemption but also the restoration of harmony with the natural world. The novel suggests that genuine transformation is achieved through humility, compassion, and respect for both humanity and the environment. This vision resonates with the Ecosufi principle that caring for creation is an expression of devotion to the Creator.

Unlike dystopian representations of ecological collapse, Tohari offers a quieter yet equally powerful critique of environmental degradation through everyday rural life. His narratives reveal that exploitation of the environment inevitably disrupts social harmony, cultural traditions, and spiritual values. By foregrounding the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the Divine, Tohari advocates an environmental ethic founded on stewardship, coexistence, and reverence. His selected works therefore demonstrate that ecological sustainability depends not only on conservation practices but also on the cultivation of spiritual consciousness and ethical responsibility.

Although Ibn Arabi, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, and Ahmad Tohari write in different historical, cultural, and literary contexts, their works converge in presenting nature as a sacred entity rather than a resource for human exploitation. Ibn Arabi establishes the metaphysical foundation of Ecosufism through Wahdat al-Wujud, asserting the unity of all existence and the Divine presence in creation. Vaughan-Lee extends this spiritual vision to contemporary ecological discourse by arguing that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of consciousness, calling for the restoration of humanity's sacred relationship with the Earth. In contrast, Ahmad Tohari translates these philosophical principles into lived experience by portraying rural communities whose cultural and spiritual identities are inseparable from the natural environment.

Despite these shared concerns, each writer employs a distinct literary strategy. Ibn Arabi adopts mystical and philosophical discourse to articulate the spiritual significance of creation. Vaughan-Lee combines Sufi spirituality with ecological activism, emphasizing inner transformation as the foundation of environmental ethics. Tohari, however, employs realistic fiction to demonstrate how ecological degradation disrupts social harmony, cultural traditions, and moral values. Together, their works challenge anthropocentric ideologies and advocate an ethical model based on reverence, stewardship, and ecological interconnectedness. Their collective contribution demonstrates that environmental sustainability cannot be achieved through scientific or political measures alone but also requires a transformation of human values and spiritual consciousness.



Conclusion

The selected works of Ibn Arabi, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, and Ahmad Tohari demonstrate that Ecosufism provides a meaningful framework for rethinking the relationship between humanity, nature, and the Divine. Through diverse literary forms, these writers reject anthropocentric conceptions of nature and instead present the environment as sacred, interconnected, and ethically significant. Their works consistently emphasize that ecological degradation is inseparable from spiritual alienation and moral responsibility. By integrating Sufi philosophy with environmental ethics, they propose an alternative ecological paradigm grounded in compassion, stewardship, and reverence for all creation.

This study argues that Ecosufism extends the scope of ecocritical inquiry by introducing spiritual consciousness as an essential dimension of environmental ethics. Rather than treating environmental conservation solely as a scientific or political concern, the selected texts advocate an ecospiritual approach that recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world. Consequently, the study contributes to contemporary environmental humanities by demonstrating that literary representations of Ecosufism offer valuable ethical insights for addressing the ecological challenges of the twenty-first century.

Works Cited:

- [1] Bagir, Zainal Abidin. "The Importance of Religion and Ecology in Indonesia." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2015, pp. 99–102.
- [2] Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination*. Harvard UP, 1995.
- [3] Capra, Fritjof. *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*. Bantam Books, 1987.
- [4] Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012.
- [5] Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. U of Georgia P, 1996.
- [6] Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke UP, 2016.
- [7] Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford UP, 2008.
- [8] Ibn Arabi. *The Bezels of Wisdom*. Translated by R. W. J. Austin, Paulist Press, 1980.
- [9] Ibn Arabi. *The Meccan Revelations*. Translated by William C. Chittick, Pir Press, 2002.
- [10] Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.
- [11] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. ABC International Group, 1997.
- [12] Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.
- [13] Tohari, Ahmad. *The Dancer*. Translated by René T. A. Lysloff, Lontar Foundation, 2012.
- [14] Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn, editor. *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Golden Sufi Center, 2013.
- [15] Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn. *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul*. Golden Sufi Center, 2021.