

Eco-Sufism and Urban Sustainability: Reimagining the Relationship between God, Humans, and Nature in Dhaka

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the transformative potential of Eco-Sufism in addressing the ecological challenges confronting Dhaka - one of the fastest-growing megacities in the world, grappling with environmental degradation and unsustainable growth. Rooted in Sufi principles of interconnectedness, compassion, and simplicity, Eco-Sufism reimagines the relationship between God, humans, and nature. Drawing on classical Sufi teachings and contemporary environmental ethics, this paper highlights Eco-Sufism's perspectives, exploring the journey from the purification of the heart to the purification of the earth, the understanding of nature as a living manifestation of the divine, and the reorientation of human roles toward nature as caretakers rather than rulers, proposing actionable solutions tailored to Dhaka's unique urban and climatic context. By bridging theology, mysticism, and environmental thought, this study advocates for a paradigm shift in how humanity perceives and interacts with the natural world. It posits Eco-Sufism as a vital pathway toward environmental sustainability and spiritual renewal, providing a spiritual roadmap for transforming Dhaka into a model of urban balance and ecological consciousness in the Global South.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating environmental crisis poses complex challenges that cannot be addressed solely through technological or policy measures. Its impacts transcend national, ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries, affecting both human communities and natural ecosystems (Rahmi & Taufik, 2024, p.46). The global environmental crisis along with its local manifestations is a challenge that supersedes all other challenges (Morris, 2023, P.10). As for Bangladesh, “Bangladesh has made important progress in economic growth and poverty reduction, but much of this progress has come at the cost of high carbon intensity and resource inefficiency, high levels of pollution, reduced climate resilience, and environmental degradation” (World Bank, 2024, Page xviii). Bangladesh continuously planning and implementing various strategies and initiatives to reduce its environmental degradation but no radical changes are seen. Rather its environmental scenarios are worsening day by day. According to the World Bank’s 2023 Country Environmental Analysis (CEA):

Environmental degradation in Bangladesh is linked to constraints in environmental governance, such as (a) regulation gaps; (b) large emphasis on environmental clearance and command-and-control policies; (c) poor monitoring and enforcement capacity; (d) limited public participation and transparency in monitoring, oversight, and decision-making; (e) limited application of the polluter pays principle, with sanctions that are not able to deter polluting activities; (f) lack of coordination and clear mandates for environmental and climate-data management among public agencies; and (g) bottlenecks at environmental courts and delays in judicial cases. (The World Bank, 2023, pp.1-2)

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, and climate change is expected to worsen this vulnerability through altered rainfall patterns and rising temperatures. These risks affect not only the local population but also the city’s natural and urban systems. In 2011, the Dhaka City Corporation was divided into two separate entities, namely the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and the Dhaka North City Corporation - DNCC (DNCC, 2024, p.19). Since the Pre-Mughal era, Dhaka (formerly known as Dacca) has served as an important hub of commerce and development in South Asia. Following its designation as the capital of newly independent Bangladesh in 1971, the city has undergone numerous transformations, not all of which have been favorable to its environment. While the term ‘environment’ means the

nature and surroundings in which all plants, animals, humans, and other living beings live and operate, environmental problems arise when there are conflicts in the maintenance of the balance among those components (Sikdar, 2021, Para 1).

According to UNEP, at least 25% of a city's total area should consist of open spaces, including green areas and water bodies (Shuvo & Hakim, 2013, p. 13). Green coverage in DSCC decreased dramatically from 46% in 1991 to 9.5% in 2021, with intermediate declines to 21.3% in 2001 and 19.7% in 2011 (Misty and et al., 2024, p.1). On the other hand, Green coverage declined by about 65.9% between 1992 and 2022 (Figure-1), leaving DNCC with only 16.17% green coverage, which is below sustainable urban greening benchmarks and a clear obstacle to achieving SDG 11 by 2030 (Shammi and et al., 2023, p.20). So, a harmonious balance between urban areas and green spaces is necessary to sustain environmental quality.

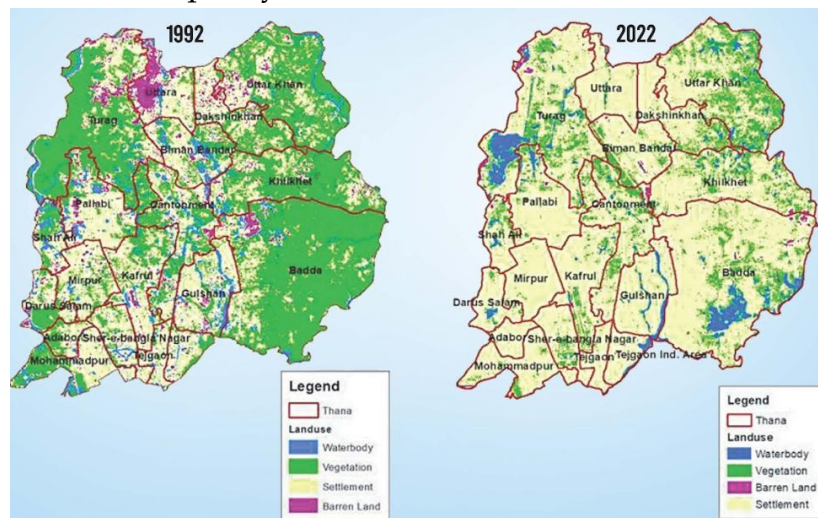


Figure-1: Green Space of Dhaka North City Corporation

Green spaces are important not only for environmental regulation but also for supporting the mental and physical well-being of people. Therefore, it is essential to properly manage Dhaka's green spaces and give more attention to this matter in the future city planning and policy making (N. Nawar, R. Sorker, F.J. Chowdhury et al., 2022, P.9). For Dhaka, Professor Anu Muhammad (2025) states:

If immediate steps are not taken, Dhaka will fully transform into a city of sick people. We are already witnessing a sharp increase in illnesses, and this will only worsen if urgent measures are not implemented. There are no playgrounds for children, no open spaces where people can breathe

fresh air, and the water we drink is contaminated. Citizens cannot even enjoy a clean and peaceful time by the river. (para 12)

Despite the formulation and implementation of various environmental laws, policies, and institutional initiatives, the ecological condition of Dhaka continues to deteriorate. This persistent degradation indicates that regulatory measures alone are insufficient to address the deeper ethical and perceptual crisis underlying environmental misconduct. A growing body of scholarship argues that religious frameworks can restore ecological awareness by reshaping the ethical foundation of human behavior. Zainal (2015, as cited in Rozi, 2019, p.243) contends that religious teachings possess transformative capacity to reinforce environmental consciousness, particularly at a time when relentless modern extraction and uncontrolled resource exploitation continue to accelerate ecological degradation. In response to this concept, the present paper examines the conceptual framework of Eco-Sufism, a contemporary application of classical Sufi spirituality to ecological concerns, as a means to reimagine God-human-nature relations. By foregrounding sacred interconnectedness, humility, and stewardship, Eco-Sufism offers a profound and potentially transformative paradigm for advancing sustainability in Dhaka.

LITERATURE RIVEW

Relational rupture between humans and the environment is also critically articulated within contemporary religious ecology discourse. Pope Francis (2015, p.17) argues that the planet's ecological crisis is the result of a distorted relationship in which humans perceive themselves as entitled dominators rather than caretakers of creation, leading to environmental exploitation and moral disengagement. Pope Francis (2015) underscores ecological interconnectedness through a theology of relational belonging, asserting, "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth" (p. 68). Similarly, Timothy Morton (2017) conceptualizes coexistence as an affective and ethical solidarity across human and nonhuman life, proposing that ecological awareness emerges not from mastery but from shared atmosphere and interdependence. He further characterizes this condition as a form of environmental hospitality, arguing that "solidarity is the default affective environment of the top layers of Earth's crust" (Morton, 2017, p. 14). His framing resonates with spiritual ecology paradigms that emphasize relational

reform, where healing the environment requires rebuilding affective bonds with more-than-human worlds rather than treating nature as property or inert matter.

Ecological consciousness has been most coherently articulated through spiritual epistemologies rather than purely juridical ones. Scholars working on religion and ecology, such as the Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (2021), argue that environmental repair requires an inner transformation of perception alongside structural change. He states:

If we remains forgetful of the sacred in all of life and do not redeem our split between spirit and matter, our planet will become more and more out of balance...We urgently need to reclaim our guardianship of the physical and sacred world. We need to remember why we are here. (p. 9)

Wendell Berry (2021, as cited in Vaughan-Lee, 2021) emphasizes that environmental stewardship is our oldest, most important, and most satisfying responsibility, and he asserts, "to care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope" (p. 11). Roland Faber (2018, p. 437) conceptualizes sustainability as a shift in human consciousness, where ecological awareness emerges from recognizing cosmic connection and shared belonging rather than human ownership over nature. He interprets the garden metaphor as a civilizational and ecological symbol that captures relational coexistence, described specifically as "a profoundly ecological symbol, naming the deeper reality of the living together of humanity and all creatures in the Truth of their interrelatedness" (Roland Faber, 2018, p. 11). His wider position asserts that meaningful religious harmony depends on transreligious cooperation that must also embrace ecological complexity, integrating environmental care into collective spiritual evolution rather than confining it to doctrinal or human-centered authority (Faber, 2018, p. 12). He further aligns ecological peace with philosophical ideas of co-existential solidarity, suggesting that alliance-building across human and nonhuman differences is essential, and that true solidarity arises from attunement to the ecological mesh that connects all forms of life rather than supremacy of one species over another.

Among Islamic knowledge traditions, the ethical cultivation is also echoed in Muslim environmental scholarship, where Sufism is recognized as a core response mechanism to ecological crises. Rozi (2019) reflects, "One of the religious dimensions developed in response to the environmental crisis is religious spiritualism. Sufism, as a religious, spiritual dimension in Islam, has contributed to the spiritual and intellectual life of Muslim (p. 43)".

Dhaka is experiencing rapid urban expansion, with environmental challenges emerging as a significant concern. Mahmud Akash et al. (2018) notes that severe pollution in the city largely results from a lack of awareness about the environmental impacts of human activities (p. 145). They further suggests that local government can enhance sustainable urban development by promoting public participation, with policymakers designing strategies for urban growth and environmental sustainability through training and facilitation for urban residents (p. 138). Complementing this view, Sultana (2021) observes that local residents are culturally unfamiliar with the ecological benefits of green spaces (p. 8). In addition, Ahsan (2013) emphasizes that Bangladesh lacks a unified and comprehensive urban development policy; instead, the country relies on several isolated policies managed by different national and local authorities (p. 3). Together, these studies indicate that rapid urbanization, limited public awareness, and fragmented policy frameworks pose challenges to sustainable urban development in Dhaka.

Although Sufism has a visible cultural presence in Dhaka, its ecological dimension remains underexplored in sustainability research, especially in relation to urban environmental imaginaries, community practice, and planning discourse. Sayem & Yasmin (2025) focus on Prophetic guidance for ecological awareness and practical interventions – “Prophetic and ecological teachings and practices, the residents of Dhaka city can bring a positive change in their attitudes and behaviours while addressing the limited natural resources of the city” (p. 356), but they do not engage with the mystical, spiritual, and transformative dimensions of Eco-Sufism, nor with Sufi-inspired community-based practices or the cultivation of ecological consciousness through experiential spirituality.

Despite this growing interdisciplinary field, a significant gap persists in investigating -how Eco-Sufi cosmology can inform urban sustainability frameworks in Dhaka, transcend conventional planning logics, and cultivate ecological consciousness that recognizes the sacred relationship between God, humans, and nature. This knowledge deficit presents an opportunity to develop sustainability paradigms that merge urban ecology with Islamic mystical environmental accountability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

This study frames the God-human-nature relationship through the lens of Spiritual Ecology, which interprets environmental sustainability as rooted in sacred interdependence, ethical trusteeship, and inner transformation. Spiritual

Ecology emphasizes that ecological degradation is not merely a technical or material problem but a manifestation of spiritual and metaphysical imbalance. Drawing on Seyyed Hossein Nasr's analysis, the ecological crisis can be understood as a crisis of de-sacralization and the loss of metaphysical consciousness (Nasr, 1990). Complementing this perspective, classical Sufi ontology conceptualizes nature as a manifestation of divine self-disclosure (*tajalli*) and positions humans as moral stewards (*khalifah*) responsible for maintaining the harmony of creation, and inspires becoming *Al-Insan Al-Kamil* (The perfect man) to ensure sustainable environment. Within this framework, sustainability extends beyond resource efficiency and environmental management; it involves restoring a sacred relational order between the Creator, the self, and the natural world. By integrating Spiritual Ecology and Sufi ethical principles, this study provides a transformative lens to examine urban environmental practices and the potential for spiritually grounded sustainability in Dhaka.

Building on this theoretical lens, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and hermeneutic approach to explore Eco-Sufism as a framework for environmental consciousness. It emphasizes textual and conceptual analysis rather than empirical data collection, focusing on the interpretation of Sufi philosophy, environmental ethics, and relevant theological discourses. Primary sources include classical Sufi texts, Qur'anic verses, and Hadiths related to nature and human stewardship, while secondary sources comprise journal articles, books, and reports addressing environmental degradation, sustainable urbanism, and spiritual ecology. The analytical process proceeds in three interrelated stages: (a) Theological grounding - examining key Sufi concepts such as *tawhid* (unity), *dhikr* (remembrance), *khalifah* (stewardship), and *zuhd* (detachment) to understand their ecological significance. (b) Philosophical interpretation - contextualizing these principles within contemporary ecological thought to uncover their practical and ethical implications. (c) Contextual application - applying Eco-Sufi insights to the environmental situation of Dhaka to propose spiritually informed policy directions and community-based initiatives. By linking Sufi ontology with contemporary environmental concerns, the study employs conceptual synthesis as a methodological tool, bridging spiritual understanding and practical sustainability, and situating Eco-Sufism as a viable framework for guiding urban environmental consciousness.

UNDERSTANDING SUFISM AND ECO-SUFISM

Sufis are originally understood as a group that claims to be servants of Allah and surrenders its entire soul to Allah alone until it loses its awareness of being united with Allah (Sugiarti and Riyanto, 2024, p. 33).

From the history of Sufism, it is known that the idea of unity was first proposed by Bayezid Bistomi. As a result, Bistomi introduced the concept of "*sukur*" (intoxication) into Sufism. These views of Bayezid Bistami greatly influenced the views of Mansur Hallaj and Ibn Arabi. Because, according to his teaching, in a state of dhikr a person forgets his personality. And he becomes intoxicated with the love of God (*sukr-behudlik*), that is, his whole body is filled with emotions, and in the end he disappears into God. He called this state *fana* (loss of existence) and first introduced this concept into Sufism. (Karimovich, 2023, p. 51)

Eco-Sufism is an emerging concept introduced by Sufi practitioners, rooted in a profound and intelligent engagement with both the environment and human well-being. At its core, this consciousness emphasizes that humans must interact with and understand their natural surroundings as a pathway to renewing their spiritual awareness (Amin, 2017, as cited in Sadjali, 2024, p. 48). Derived from the combination of "Sufism" and "ecology," the term ecological Sufism, or eco-Sufism, represents a dimension of Islamic mystical philosophy that explores the relationship between humans and nature as a path toward understanding and uniting with God. The term *Ecological Sufism* is close to the meaning of spiritual ecology, ecological spirituality, greening religion, and green spirituality (Suwito, 2011, as cited in Sururi, 2020, p. 7).

Islam promotes a balanced and nature-friendly lifestyle through Eco-Sufism. Syeed Hossein Nasr's phrase "ecological Sufism" comes from Ibn Arabi's Sufi concept of *wahdatul wujud*, which refers to a way of thinking and acting and treating nature as it should be, so that humans truly become responsible khalifahs in maintaining the universe (Sadjil, 2024, P. 52). From a worldly perspective, Sufis are uniquely positioned to take a leading role in fostering environmental awareness. For Sufis, the natural world is not a separate or subordinate entity but a manifestation of the Divine. Maintaining a healthy and green environment is not only a matter of ecological responsibility but also a spiritual necessity. A harmonious environment nurtures the inner journey of the *salik* (seeker of the sublime truth), allowing them to feel an intimate connection with all of creation. In such a conducive atmosphere, the *salik* is gently drawn toward a state of *tawhid* - the oneness of being - where the boundaries between self, nature, and the Divine

begin to dissolve (Ansari, 2012, para 3). Eco-Sufism, with its holistic thought of interconnectedness, inspires for spiritual and environmental sustainability.

In this light, Eco-Sufism is not merely an academic construct but a lived spirituality that calls for ethical engagement with the earth, moderation in consumption, and reverence toward all forms of life. It invites believers to rediscover the sacred dimension of the environment and to act as compassionate custodians of creation.

Exploring the Interconnection of God, Humans, and Nature in Eco-Sufism

The current environmental crisis urges a reevaluation of humanity's role within the broader order of creation and our purpose on Earth. This question is particularly important as human activities have profoundly altered the planet, causing significant impacts on natural ecosystems. In pursuing our selfish socioeconomic interests, we often overlook the integrity, sacredness, and interconnectedness of the Earth (Morris, 2023, p. 8). The study of green Sufism emphasizes recognizing the sacredness of nature and understanding the purpose of the universe for humanity. Spiritual awareness cultivates wisdom in relation to God, humans, and nature. Recent environmental disasters, however, reflect a decline in this wisdom, impacting the core of the ecosystem (Supardi et al., 2022, pp. 88-89). Syyed Hossein Nasr in his book titled - *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*, states "That the harmony between man and nature has been destroyed, is a fact which most people admit. But not everyone realizes that this disequilibrium is due to the destruction of the harmony between man and God" (Nasr, 1990, p. 20).

In the Sufi tradition, the relationship between God and nature is very close. Ibn 'Arabi, for example, mentions that nature is the *tajallî* (manifestation) of God. As His manifestation, the cosmos is the actualized appearance of God. It means that the glorification of nature is not an attitude of *kufr* or *shirk* but a manifestation of the *tawhid* attitude. This view seems pantheistic, but apart from the controversy regarding its error among Islamic intellectuals, this pantheistic understanding contributes to environmental wisdom. Pantheism is used as an ethical foothold to emphasize the imperatives to protect nature as a manifestation of God. (Supardi et al., 2022, p. 89).

There is an existential unity between God, man, and nature, with God as pure existence. In contrast, man and nature as His manifestations are plural and hierarchical depending on their level of closeness to God. Thus,

nature has sacred rights that humans must respect and glorify even though humans have primacy over nature. All entities (not only humans) will return to Him (God as the goal of all things) as each entity originates from Him. Therefore, the Sufis deserve the title of true guardians of the natural environment because they place great emphasis on the issue of respecting and preserving nature. (Supardi et al., 2022, p. 92).

In the teachings of Ibn Arabi, the term “Truth” (Allah) is explained with different definitions and interpretations. Sometimes he explains “Truth” as the same as “Humans” (created beings), and sometimes he means that Truth has degraded to the level of humans. (Karimovich, 2023, p. 51).

In shifting the lens from Muhammad, peace be upon him, to humanity in general, Ibn Arabi’s worldview holds that humanity’s spiritual realization is critical to all of existence. This position is linked to the pervasive Islamic view that the cosmos is not an end unto itself; rather, it was created so that human beings could come into existence. While all other creatures in the cosmos glorify God in terms of their station or capacity, Ibn Arabi asserts that only the human being as a comprehensive being is able to fully glorify God (Shaikh, 2015, P. 91). Humans have a goal that is perfecting faith, piety, and morals, as well as actively building a nation’s civilization that is dignified with *ma'rifatullah* (Knowing the God). So that humans have a vision divine that is worshiping God, with its mission to maintain the order and nature of the environment (Budiyanti. N., Aziz, A., & Erihadiana, M. 2020, p. 79). A key environmental theme in the Quran is the idea of stewardship, known as *Khilafah*. Humanity is designated as the caretaker of the Earth, bearing the duty to safeguard and sustain it. As stated in Surah Al-Baqarah, “It is He who has made you successors (*Khalifah*) upon the Earth” (Quran 2:30), highlighting the profound responsibility entrusted to humans to protect the natural world. In that case, God, Humans and nature relationship may be understood through Spiritual ecology (Figure-2).

Spiritual Ecology

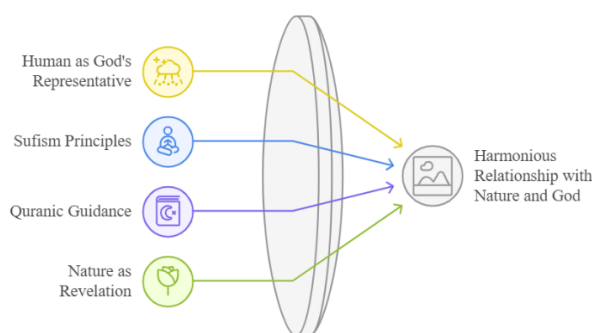


Figure-2-Note. This image was taken from “Eco-Sufism and Asceticism” by Rohman et al. (2024). Significance of Sufism in Environmental Sustainability: Eco-Sufism Movement in Islamic Boarding School (p.166). Copyright 2024 by International Journal of Islamic Boarding School.

In the realm of ‘sacred animals, ecology and nature align to create meaningful symbols that reflect the harmony between God, humans, and the natural world. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Bangladesh and Pakistan, along with empirical materials collected from local Sufi communities, Sara Kuehn (2021) investigates the environmental engagements of selected Sufi shrines in these regions and she reflects about the ancient practice of keeping ‘sacred animals’ in semi-captivity at some of the most famous Muslim ‘natural’ sacred sites in Bangladesh. These sites include the shrine (*mazar*) of Bayazid Bostami in Chittagong - whose name became associated with this Sufi sanctuary in the 18th century - and its dynamic eco-spiritual relationship with a large population of huge black soft-shell turtles known as Bostami Kasim, as well as snakehead fish (*gozar*), living in a freshwater pond within the compound. The Shah Jalal Shrine in Sylhet features a freshwater tank with *gozar* fish beside the tomb of the renowned Bengali Sufi saint (*pir*), and its compound is also home to blue rock pigeons. The Seyyed Chasni Pir Mazar, also located in Sylhet, hosts a population of monkeys, while the Khan Jahan Ali Mazar in Bagerhat houses marsh crocodiles in its adjoining water bodies. Taming and caring these ‘sacred animals’ signify ecological and spiritual harmony.

Thus, animals are not merely resources for human use but spiritual beings with intrinsic value. Recognizing this, Muslims are called to treat animals with compassion and protect their lives, acknowledging their role in the broader spiritual and ecological balance. Moreover, the Quran contains over 200 references to animals, and six chapters are named after them or insects - *Surah Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), *Surah Al-An’am* (The Cattle), *Surah An-Nahl* (The Bees), *Surah An-Naml* (The Ants), *Surah Al-‘Ankabut* (The Spider), and *Surah Al-Fil* (The Elephant) - demonstrating their profound significance in the Islamic worldview (Mecca Institute, 2025, para-3). So, Quran also signifies in many ways to protect nature.

This study contends precisely that Eco-Sufism, or Green Sufism, is a relatively new Sufi concept that emerges from the unification of environmental awareness and divine awareness. Environmental awareness - to protect, understand, and utilize nature responsibly - is inseparably linked to spiritual consciousness. That is, loving the universe is part of loving God. Thus, loving something that belongs to God is the same as loving God. Eco-Sufism also calls

for a transformation from spiritual consciousness to ecological consciousness, emphasizing the need for active implementation and ecological movement (Wirajaya, A.Y., et al. 2021, p. 2). Thus, the ultimate aim is to achieve universal harmony between nature, Sufi practitioners and God. This interconnected harmony fosters mutual love: between human beings and God, among humans themselves, and between humans and the natural world. Thus, the interconnectedness among these beings works for a sustainable future.

Becoming *Insan Kamil* and Safeguarding Environment

The reality of contemporary life reveals a widespread lack of concern for the environment, which in turn contributes significantly to environmental degradation at local, national and global levels. "Therefore, the ecosystem damage in various places and regions has become a serious threat to the survival of the life of the universe. Humans are closely related to nature and they have a great responsibility to protect the universe". (Budiyanti. N., Aziz, A., & Erihadiana, M. 2020, p. 72). Nasr (1990) states "Men no longer climb spiritual mountains. They now want to conquer all mountain peaks. There is everywhere the desire to conquer nature, but in the process the value of the conqueror himself, who is man, is destroyed and his very existence threatened" (p. 19). He also adds:

They wish to remove the problems brought about by the destruction of the equilibrium between man and nature through further conquest and domination of nature. Few would be willing to admit that acutest social and technical problems facing mankind today come not from so-called 'under development' but from 'over development'... Furthermore, perhaps not all realize that in order to gain this peace with nature, there must be peace with the spiritual order. To be at peace with the Earth one must be at peace with Heaven. (p.13)

As discussed before, Syyed Hossein Nasr's ecological Sufism was motivated from Ibn Arabi. Ibn Arabi's most famous concept of Sufism is *Tajalli* (Manifestation), *wahdat al-wujud* (Unification of being) and *al-Insan al-Kamil* (the perfect man). (Buana, 2017, p. 440). For a peaceful existence through ecological and spiritual order, this paper contends to inspire the idea of becoming *Al-Insan al-Kamil* or the perfect man. In the realm of Islamic mysticism, the doctrine of *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, or the Perfect Man, holds a sacred position. Attributed to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, its roots are often traced to the profound

insights of Ibn Arabi (Dar, 2024). In his work titled *Fusus al Hikam (The Seals of Wisdom)* Ibn Arabi (n.d, p. 127) states:

“Muhammad's wisdom is uniqueness because he is the most perfect existent creature of this human species. For this reason, the command began with him and was sealed with him. He was a Prophet while Adam was between water and clay, and his elemental structure is the Seal of the Prophets”.

This argument has been more clarified as Shaikh Sadiyya states:

A crucial figure in Ibn Arabi's cosmology and his discussions on *al-Insan al-Kamil* is the Prophet Mohammad. While all prophets reflect the archetype of the spiritually complete human, Muhammad is unique because, according to Ibn Arabi, the prophet Muhammad was created as a cosmic being prior to his historical existence.... He took on an embodied form as the historical prophet only after his original creation. Based on a hadith where the prophet states “I was a prophet even while adam was between water and clay”, Ibn Arabi avers that since Muhammad was the most perfect being among the human race, the entire creation began and ended with him. (Shaikh, 2012, p. 89)

Insan Kamil is the ideal human being with the highest degree compared to other creatures. His role as the caliph of Allah Most High as the leader of the world, keeps the world safe, peaceful and orderly. *Insan Kamil* is not only someone who is physically perfect, but someone who is perfect in his knowledge (Budiyanti et al., 2016, as cited in Budiyanti et al., 2020, p. 74). The Holy Quran and hadith contain numerous textual evidences in support of environmental stewardship. The Quran says, “It is He who has appointed you vicegerent on the earth and exalted some of you in rank above others, so that He may test you by means of what he has given you” (Surah al-An’am, 6:165).

Analyzing an ancient manuscript, entitled ‘*Syar Nashiat*’ that found in Bali, Indonesia, Wirajya et al (2021b, p. 46) concluded that “The principles of Sufi therapy contained in the SN text are as follows: (1) *takhalli*; (2) *tahalli*; and (3) *tajalli*. This all reflects the work of *Insan kamil*, who closed all the doors leading to the peace of mind, joy, justice, happiness and disobedience of Allah SWT”. They also clarify that:

In Sufistic therapy, every human being must go through the process of *takhalli* (cleaning the soul from wrong actions and sins - repentance *an-nasukha*), *tahalli* (filling the soul with good and positive things, such as remembrance, prayer, and recitations), and *tajali* (the opening of the veil that has been covering the eyes of the human mind). These three stages must be carried out seriously so that humans can reach the level of 'Insan Kamil.' When this 'insan kamil' stage can be achieved by humans, then he will receive the abundance of Allah's grace (p. 42).

Unquestioningly, humanity is anthropocentric, the belief that we are most important of all created entities, and an assumption that everything else has been created for human benefit. Consequently, we contribute immensely to global warming, pollute the air, land and water, and destroy our habitat along with its inhabitants. (Morris, 2023, p. 9). This attitude grows in reflection of misinterpreting or misunderstanding the role of humans toward nature. But if we look at the Quran, we find that "He is the One who produces gardens - both cultivated and wild - and palm trees, crops of different flavours, olives, and pomegranates - similar 'in shape', but dissimilar 'in taste'. Eat of the fruit they bear and pay the dues at harvest, but do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful" (Quran 6:141). Thus Holy Qur'an inspires spiritual and moral ecological guidelines for human.

Insan Kamil is considered as a human who is trying to realize his status as a servant of Allah and his role as *khalifatullah* who has a Divine vision to worship Allah and they also have mission in maintaining natural order and prosperity of the environment. (Budiyanti. N., Aziz, A., & Erihadiana, M. 2020, p. 72). As discussed, Prophet Muhammad is *Insan Kamil* or the Perfect Man, Humans are suggested to follow his teachings; "The world is beautiful and verdant, and verily God, be He exalted, has made you His stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves." (Muslim, Hadith no. 2742); "If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him." (Bukhari, Hadith no.2320); "Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded," (Musnad, Hadith no. 374). Thus, The Prophet Muhammad gave high degree of importance towards sustainable cultivation of land, waste minimization, humane treatment of animals, preservation of natural resources and protection of wildlife (Zafar, 2024).

Applying the principles of *Insan Kamil* to Dhaka entails cultivating an environmentally conscious citizenry through education, awareness programs,

and participatory urban initiatives. International examples demonstrate that community engagement can yield tangible ecological benefits. In Shanghai and Guangzhou, China, resident participation and consciousness-raising programs significantly improved waste management and urban greening (Hasan & Mulamootti, 1994, p. 199). Similarly, in Dhaka, integrating spiritual-ethical frameworks inspired by Eco-Sufism can: encourage sustainable waste management practices, promote the preservation and expansion of urban green spaces, and cultivate a sense of shared ecological responsibility rooted in spiritual ethics. By fostering the development of *Insan Kamil*, residents can internalize the ethical imperative to protect the environment, ultimately contributing to a sustainable, harmonious, and spiritually enriched urban ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the spiritual and ethical principles of Eco-Sufism and urban sustainability through re-imagining the interconnected relationship between God, humans, and nature, this paper contends that humans must journey from the purification of the heart to the purification of the earth, understand nature as a living manifestation of the Divine, and reorient their role toward nature as caretakers, not rulers. Eco-Sufism invites a return to humility, balance, and compassion - values that can restore harmony between the material and the spiritual, and between human civilization and the environment. In this sense, the ecological crisis is not merely a physical or policy failure but a spiritual crisis born out of disconnection from the sacredness of nature.

In the context of Dhaka, a city facing immense environmental challenges due to rapid urbanization and unsustainable growth, the principles of Eco-Sufism provide both a moral and spiritual framework for action. The process of becoming *Insan Kamil* (the Perfect Man) symbolizes an inner and outer transformation - where self-purification leads to social and ecological responsibility. If individuals and communities cultivate this consciousness, for example; policymakers can build structured partnerships with Sufi scholars, khanqahs, and cultural or civic organizations to co-design community-led sustainability campaigns that foreground eco-ethical teachings, tree-planting, responsible water use, and household-level waste reduction through spiritually framed public messaging on stewardship (khalifah) and moral accountability; at the community and institutional level, local neighborhoods, schools, universities, madrasas, and Sufi circles may institutionalize weekly or monthly “clean-earth gatherings” that combine reflective dhikr sessions, environmental sermons, participatory waste segregation training, and hands-on ecological actions such as

canal and riverbank clean-ups, community water conservation pledges, and peer-volunteer environmental monitoring; simultaneously, higher-education and faith-based learning networks can introduce short interdisciplinary modules or co-curricular training on Eco-Sufism, urban environmental ethics, and sustainable development to connect inner consciousness with applied sustainability practices, and they can collectively foster a sustainable urban life that honors both divine creation and human stewardship. Therefore, embracing Eco-Sufism is not only a path toward personal enlightenment but also a viable spiritual and ethical strategy for reimagining urban sustainability in Dhaka and beyond. By aligning ecological action with spiritual awareness, humanity can move toward a future where development coexists with devotion, and progress harmonizes with preservation.



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