

## Syed Hossein Nasr's Ecosufism: Re-examining the Relationship between God, Man and Nature to Solve the Environmental Crisis

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### Abstract

The phenomenon of environmental crisis in the modern era has occurred in all parts of the world, this crisis is caused by the loss of spiritual values and a paradigm shift from cosmocentric to anthropocentric, thus placing humans apart from the ecosystem environment. This research is literature research; in this research, there are two sources used, namely primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to the book *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* by Syed Hossein Nasr, while secondary sources include the works of people who have a connection with the problem to be studied the findings of this study show that Sufism in the modern era can contribute significantly in dealing with the environmental crisis. Eco-sufism is a new concept presented by Sufism scholars such as Syed Hossein Nasr with intelligent consideration of the environment and human welfare. The underlying premise of this awareness is that humans must understand and interact with their environment as a means of renewing their spiritual awareness. According to Nasr, the solution that must be understood in the development of ecosufism is the scope of ecosufism itself, namely knowing the relationship between God, humans and nature. Thus, people will gain a fundamental understanding of the management of natural resources from an exploitative attitude towards nature through a study of Syed Hossein Nasr's ideas about eco-sufism. Consequently, nature becomes an integral part of human life.

## INTRODUCTION

The entire hemisphere is experiencing a widespread environmental crisis, caused by a spiritual crisis in humanity. (Syed Hossein Nasr: 1978) This crisis is related to the "materialistic" way of life. Many projects launched by the government and the private sector focus on and explain the purpose of the slow economic growth. In the long run, this policy will prevent disorientation in daily life.

As stated by Fritjof Capra, a leading scientist in a book entitled "*The Turning Point*", humanity discovered a global ecological crisis and complex and multidimensional problems at the beginning of the 21st century. (Fritjof Capra: 1983) One of the main causes of this environmental damage is due to the lack of human awareness that emphasizes more on his position as khalifah, resulting in humans becoming anthropocentric, feeling the most entitled to control and exploit nature in

order to fulfill all their needs. However, humans often act to exploit nature beyond the limits of their needs even though science and technology have become increasingly sophisticated in overcoming the ecological crisis.

Despite the tremendous advances in science and technology in modern times, morality and religion remain key factors in human development (Mujlipah, 2023), including environmental sustainability. While the government provides analytical tools to help people understand the crisis better, there is no ethical or moral basis to correct its selfishness in relation to the environment. Post-modern initiatives of this kind may work for some, but long-term solutions require a deeper understanding of human interaction with the environment. A moral and ethical mindset about the world is shaped by faith and spiritual traditions, not by knowledge and technology alone.

According to Majoriic Hope and James Young, the anthropocentric view makes humans forget spiritual values and causes a prolonged environmental crisis. The further humans get away from religion, the more it will result in the loss of control systems for every action taken. (Nur Alfiah Febriani: 2011). To overcome environmental problems, it is necessary to understand Sufism and practice it in daily life. This practice must go beyond religious institutions and include the entire population as a whole. As an alternative to Sufism, it should be noted that many people in the midst of this crisis are seeking solutions from the path of Sufism. Sufism is currently gaining momentum which is sought after given the current world crisis and the phenomena affecting modern man. Finally, ecosufism or what is known as Sufism-based ecology emerged as a new approach in addressing the issue of environmental crisis from an Islamic spiritualist perspective. (Syafwan Rozi: 2019) Syed Hossein Nasr has a perspective which is interesting about environmental ethics in spiritual Islam (Sufism). For him, Islam is very concerned about this.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Seyyed Hossein Nasr was born on April 7, 1933 in Tehran, Iran. His basic education was obtained through informal education at home and formally through traditional schools in his hometown. He learned how to memorize the Koran and Old Persian poetry at this institution. He was tutored by the great scholar Tabataba'i, a leading intellectual in Iran, who was called by his father to study philosophy, kalam and Sufism. Nasr pursued higher education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States, where he was able to earn a B.S. and MA in physics. He then continued his doctoral program at Harvard University and obtained his Ph.D in 1958 (Komaruddin Hidayat: 1987).

Nasr has been a Shia believer since birth, but Nasr is highly respected by the Sunnis. Nasr has written fifty books and more than five hundred articles. Nasr's academic studies are in various fields of science, including physics, but his works mostly discuss natural and environmental issues in relation to spirituality. His writings also include traditionalism and modernism, Eastern and Western cultures and ideologies, religion and secularity, spirituality and science, music and meditation, art and reflection, the profane and the sacred, philosophy, literature, history, and the environment. Her deep knowledge of several multidisciplinary fields and her

outstanding expertise in these fields Nasr seeks to prove that traditional knowledge has intrinsic value to human civilization and contributes to modern science in pursuit of the continuation of human culture, art, religion, environment and science (Sayem: 2020).

When it comes to Sufism, Seyyed Hossein Nasr can be said to have a strong view of ethics, especially in the field of ecology, seen in his works such as, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. Ecological Sufism is a combination of two concepts, namely Sufism and ecology. Tasawwuf means the spiritual dimension of Islam, while ecology is defined as environment, habitat, or home. More specifically, ecology, according to Eugene P. Odum, is a scientific discipline that studies the relationship between humans and their environment, or the science of the reciprocal relationship between living things and their environment. (Syafwan Rozi: 2019)

To understand ecosufism, one must also understand ethics in daily life or Sufism ethics. Etiquette refers to expressing urgent values in daily life. The word "ethos" is taken from the Greek meaning "place of bias, habit, and disposition". Aristotle later described it as a theory that examines individual biases or a theory that people tend to practice. The term ethics can also be used as a moral compass for a person in pursuing his or her life goals. (Bertens. K:2011) The etiquette of the eco-sufism movement, however, is characterized by the practice of breathing in the surrounding environment. Suwito states there are three actions that must be taken. The first Takhalli is to recognize that environmental destruction is a form of terrorism. The second Tahalli, or state, is when humans have finished building the foundation with the best possible intentions, such as exerting strength to pursue a goal. The third tajalli is applying the values of ecosufism towards the environment. This concept is the basis for Sufis as a form of solution for the environment (Suwito: 2017).

Eco-sufism is a new concept presented by Sufi practitioners with an intelligent consideration of the environment and human well-being. The underlying premise of this consciousness is that humans must understand and interact with their environment as a means of renewing their spiritual awareness. The unification of these two consciousnesses is an effort to transform a more concrete spiritual consciousness that fosters spirituality. (Amin. M.L: 2017)

Nasr states that there are two concepts for understanding Sufism, namely the transcendent unity of being and the perfect human being. The first principle derived from Ibn 'Arabi's theory is that all reality in the world today is God's creation as tajjalli, and humans are God's purest creation. It is this relationship between man and God that compels man to obey all of God's teachings. This is what Nasr calls "environmental ethics" according to Sufism or "eco-sufism ethics". This clearly shows that the theory of Sufism is not influenced by other theories such as anthropocentric theory, ecocentric theory. (Suwito: 2017).

## METHOD

The research method is a way to find data obtained in research, which is an effort to discover, develop, test the truth of knowledge carried out in a scientific and practical way. (Kaelan: 2005) Research methods are basically several ways that are arranged systematically, logically and purposefully, so that they are expected to be

able to answer the formulation of problems scientifically.

This research is literature research, namely a review of various books, literature, notes and reports related to the problem to be studied. (Suharsimi Arikunto: 2022) In general, this research has two stages, namely data collection and data analysis. In the data collection stage, the author documents data from sources related to the research topic. The intended data sources are primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources include Syed Hossen Nasr's works, such as *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, while secondary sources include the works of people who have a connection with the problem to be studied. Furthermore, after the documentation is done, it is then analyzed by reducing words, data classification, data display and data interpretation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The scope of Syed Hossein Nasr's ecosufism

Nasr's thinking about ecology comes from the Qur'an, according to him it is very clear, that there is no spirituality that is not in line with the Qur'an, because, the Qur'an teaches humans to be able to reach the creator. (Syed Hossein Nasr: 1980). So, it is very clear that there is no Sufism that is not based on the Qur'an. Nasr emphasized that the purpose of Sufism is to free humans from pluralistic chains, purify them from hypocrisy, and perfect them so that they become *al-insan al-kamil*, or universal humans. (Syed Hossein Nasr: 1991)

Sayyed Hossein Nasr is of the view that the Quran provides an explanation of nature. The Quran does not only discuss human morals, but also ethics towards the universe, including humans, animals, plants, and water and this is proof that Allah SWT really exists. Nasr's idea of nature as a manifestation of God is inseparable. There are three hierarchies of Islamic nature, First, everyone submits to God (Muslim); second, everyone obtains fitrah from God by surrendering; and third, gnostic wisdom or nature is the highest attitude in a person. The whole earth and everything on it is always represented by these three conceptions. (Suwito: 2017).

When it comes to ecology, there are at least three main concepts that shape the perspective when discussing ecological ethics. First, the anthropocentric view, which sees humans as the core of the universe. This view gives rise to moral egoism and utilitarianism, both of which have very negative tendencies. According to Alef Theria Wasim, this ethic is incompatible with the goals of religion because humans are religious beings who practice their religion correctly. (Alef Theria Wasim: 2005) The ethical connection between humans, nature and God includes efforts to preserve, protect and care for the environment. If environmental degradation is allowed to continue, life will eventually become unattractive and even religion will become extinct and disappear. Second, the biocentric view argues that everything in the universe has value and deserves to be appreciated and treated well. Third, the ecocentrism view argues that humans are no longer the center of the universe.

Nasr's focus on the environmental crisis begins with his view of the environmental crisis caused by human action. Nasr asserts that the current ecological crisis is the result of humanity's failure to protect the environment. In other words, the ecological crisis is the result of a scientific way of life that considers modern

science as the only way to manage the universe. (Maftukhin: 2016)

In his book already informs about the future of nature published in the 1960s: *Rachel Carson's Silent Spiring and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's The Ecounter of Man and Nature*. This work is assumed to be the beginning of the environmental movement that Nasr initiated in the following decades, therefore Nasr worked on it relentlessly to explain the nature and dimensions of the ecological crisis. According to Nasr's writings, what must be understood in the development of ecosufism is the scope of ecosufism itself, namely knowing the relationship between God, humans and nature.

## God

In the religious tradition, God is always placed at the top of the Islamic discourse. Beginning with the affirmation "there is no god but Allah", with that, humans should act according to what is determined by God, as Nasr states that:

"It will be possible for man to gain knowledge of God and recognize him as Reality, because of his god-given intelligence, but to gain this knowledge, it is necessary to have knowledge of the metaphysical through revelation and wisdom". (Syed Hossein Nasr: 1993)

The meaning of Nasr's statement above implies that to gain knowledge about God and describe him as the ultimate reality, due to man's inherent god-given intelligence. However, acquiring such knowledge requires the knowledge of the metaphysical, i.e. revelation and intellect.

## Human

In this discussion of ecosufism, it is humans who have the greatest influence. Given this, it is clear that ecosufism is needed in this situation to at least partially explain the current state of the world. Man as the khalifah on earth is that man is the most perfect tajalli (manifestation) of God, who is the center of existence; that is, man as a microcosm, which is then reflected in the macrocosmic world. (Afifi. A: 1989) Because of this human nature, humans are appointed as caliphs on earth, because humans realize that they are able to carry it out with the blessing of reason given.

In this context, Nasr also emphasizes that humans cannot be caliphs on one side only, but must also be able to be caliphs on the other side, that is, they cannot be khalifatullah without being abdullah, according to Nasr. This is different from Nasruddin Anshoriy's statement which describes the two concepts in question (khalifah and abdullah) as a stratum. According to Nasruddin Anshoriy, Khalifatullah is the highest degree above abdullah. (Suwito: 2017)

Humanity holds the title as God's representative, this is because humans receive a mandate from God. According to Nasr, humans who destroy nature are the same as humans who destroy nature. betraying the mandate. According to him, there is nothing more dangerous for the universe if man no longer accepts the fact that he is the khalifah of God who must submit to God's rules. (Seyyed Hossein Nasr: 1993)

Sufism provides guidance for the human journey. This is due to the two pillars of Sufism according to Nasr, namely the transcendent unity of being and perfect man. The first principle is the same as Ibn 'Arabi's principle, which states that all reality is a reflection of God as tajalli. Humans are the only humans who are able to become

perfect mirrors for God. (Seyyed Hossein Nasr: 1981) Assumptions about humans related to their identity as perfect servants of God must obey God's rules, so that they are not trapped in anthropocentric understanding and the problem of environmental crisis will be resolved.

The main cause of the environmental crisis is actually caused by the current human spiritual crisis. Nasr mentioned that the spiritual crisis around the world is caused by Cartesian who prioritizes *rational thinking* that relies on the use of ratios alone without using intuition and gnostic.

### **Nature**

If seen from a Sufi perspective, nature has its own existence. Nature is more than just a lifeless object that humans take advantage of. The ability to manage and make nature a friend of life where mutual understanding can develop between humans and nature. It is now up to us to decide whether we will continue to destroy nature or create harmony and peace between the two. God has given us the authority to manage nature responsibly because we are its masters and protectors known as God's representatives (*khalifah*). (Syafwan Rozi: 2019)

Nasr's main ideas related to ecology stem from his views on monotheism. According to Nasr, the Qur'an serves as the primary foundation of environmental ethics in Islam. The Qur'an does not only tell stories about men and women, but it also tells stories about nature and its contents as evidence of its existence. Nasr sees the urgency of the need to include aspects of sensibility that encourage the birth of knowledge that is not just scientific, but the birth of a higher structure of knowledge. Nasr calls it traditional knowledge. According to Nasr, traditional knowledge allows us to think of nature as sacred. (Syed Hossen Nasr: 2004) In other words, nature is seen as the basis of an intuitive perspective, resulting in the knowledge that nature is a theophany of God.

If traced, Nasr's monotheistic thinking is influenced by Ibn 'Arabi's theory of *tajalli*, which he uses to refer to the manifestation of God. Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the embodiment of ideology that teaches the manifestation of God can be used as a basis for ethics in protecting nature. This theory states that creatures and God are one entity (*Wahdatul wujud*). For him the truth about God is not only sourced in the ratio, but intuition and gnostic. (Ali Hasan Zaidi: 2013) With this gnostic knowledge, the entire universe is attributed to its creator. All the contents of nature are emanations of God.

### **Man as *al-insan al-Kamil***

The current ecological crisis is an undeniable reality in this modern era. This problem is caused by humans who are no longer friendly to the environment. Anthropocentric behavior is a person who believes that humans are the center of the universe, only they have the right to control nature. This kind of understanding is a partial understanding that reduces the reality of the values that exist in nature. Syed Hossen Nasr's view of the environment actually stems from his vision of the current human spiritual crisis. Nasr emphasized that in order for modern humans to

overcome environmental problems, they must re-embrace spirituality. (Abdul Quddus: 2010)

Humans seem to be free to do as they please as long as their needs are not met. Given the task of being a caliph by God, humans need to reflect on their true identity. Due to the rapid flow of modernity and technology, when society starts to show signs of alienation, people need spiritual guidance to regain their true identity. (Syukur: 2012) Islam promotes a balanced and nature-friendly lifestyle through ecosufism. 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. Ibn 'Arabi said that nature is a mirror of God. Nature has an infinite number of forms. Similar to someone standing in front of many mirrors around him. The perfect mirror of God will make man become *al-Insan al-Kamil* because the perfect man reflects all the names and attributes of God. (Mastaka Takeshita: 1983)

As God's caliph, man ranks as the highest degree of nature. The perfection of nature depends on man's caliphship. For Ibn 'Arabi, as well as Nasr, humans are to nature as the spirit is to the body. Thus, the concept of *khalifah Allah fi al-'arḍis* not a value-free concept that places humans as rulers or kings. Not only is it anthropocentric (humans as the center), but also anthropocosmic (seeing the aspect of higher value, namely God) and anthropocosmic (humans as part of nature) ecological piety has been emphasized by Ibn 'Arabi in his *insan kamil* through the roles of humans as *khalifah* of God. He recognizes the glory of man as the highest in all of God's creations. This perfect human being has personal piety, social even ecological piety. Achieving such piety through *maqam* and *ahwal* in Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism, humans are ecologically positioned in the center of the macrocosm as a component of the biotic microcosm, especially compared to nearly two million other types of living things. Spiritually, humans are obliged to have commitment and integrity to the Creator of nature. Accountability is then reflected through interactions in a unique ecosystem built on physical, non-physical and metaphysical properties. (Syafwan Rozi: 2019)

## CONCLUSION

Environmental degradation has become a complicated and difficult topic to deal with. Nasr's focus on the environmental crisis begins with his view of the environmental crisis caused by human actions. Nasr asserts that the current ecological crisis is the result of humanity's failure to protect the environment. Humans seem to be free to do as they please as long as their needs have not been met. Humans are given the task as *khalifah* by God, so humans should reflect on their true identity. Due to the rapid flow of modernity and technology then need guidance spiritual guidance to get back identity self, Islam promotes a balanced and nature-friendly lifestyle through ecosufism.

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