



Toward a Gender-Inclusive Ecological Paradigm in the Qur'an

Nurhalima Nurhalima ✉, Suraya Attamimi, Muhammad Rafiiy Rahim

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Abstract: Environmental degradation and gender inequality remain interconnected global challenges, particularly within societies where ecological exploitation marginalizes women's participation in environmental governance and conservation. Although previous Islamic ecological studies have discussed ecofeminism and environmental ethics separately, limited research has comprehensively examined gender-oriented ecology within the Qur'anic perspective. This study aims to analyze the concept of gender-oriented ecology in the Qur'an and explore its implications for inclusive environmental ethics. The research employed a qualitative library research design using the thematic (*maudhu'i*) interpretation approach. Primary data consisted of Qur'anic verses related to environmental ethics, stewardship, ecological balance, and gender equality, while secondary data were collected from contemporary scholarly literature published between 2021 and 2025. Data were analyzed descriptively through thematic categorization, contextual interpretation, and comparative analysis using *Tafsir Al-Misbah* and *Tafsir Al-Azhar* as primary interpretative references. The findings identified five major Qur'anic ecological principles and three dominant gender-related ecological dimensions emphasizing collective stewardship, ethical responsibility, interdependence, equality, and environmental sustainability. The study also found that women possess equal ecological responsibilities and rights in environmental preservation according to Qur'anic teachings. Furthermore, the concept of *hifz al-bi'ah* strengthens environmental conservation as a shared Islamic obligation for both men and women. This study demonstrates that the Qur'an promotes an inclusive ecological paradigm by integrating environmental ethics, gender equality, and spiritual responsibility. These findings contribute to contemporary scholarship by establishing a clear theological foundation for gender-inclusive sustainability frameworks within modern Muslim societies.

Introduction

Environmental degradation has become one of the most urgent global challenges, threatening ecological sustainability as well as social welfare (1, 2). Environmental crises such as pollution, deforestation, and exploitation of natural resources often disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, particularly women, who play important roles in maintaining environmental sustainability within families and communities (3, 4). In the Qur'anic perspective, both men and women are entrusted as *khalifah* on earth and therefore share equal responsibility in preserving nature and preventing environmental destruction (5–7). This demonstrates that environmental preservation in Islam is not only an

ecological issue but also a moral, spiritual, and social responsibility grounded in justice and balance.

Recent studies have increasingly examined the relationship between gender and ecology within Islamic discourse, particularly through the growing development of Islamic ecotheology studies and interdisciplinary environmental approaches (8). Hidayati (2021) emphasized that men and women possess equal responsibilities in environmental preservation according to the Qur'an (5). Similarly, Shodiq and Anwar (2021) argued that environmental conservation is a collective human obligation without gender distinction (6). Purike *et al.* (2023) further highlighted ecofeminism as both a political ideology and social praxis that strengthens women's participation in environmental protection (4). Meanwhile, Istianah and Khusniyah (2024) demonstrated that women

hold strategic roles in environmental conservation, although they are frequently marginalized in environmental policymaking (3). Agustina (2023) also explained that environmental preservation can be understood within the framework of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, particularly through the principle of *hifz al-bi'ah* (environmental protection), which applies equally to both men and women (9). However, most existing studies remain limited to discrete discussions of localized women's participation or isolated ecofeminist perspectives; hence, there remains a critical gap in comprehensively synthesizing these elements into an integrated, gender-oriented ecological paradigm within Qur'anic discourse.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the concept of gender-oriented ecology in the Qur'an through a thematic (*maudhu'i*) interpretation of verses related to environmental ethics, human stewardship, and gender equality. This research employs qualitative library research using a thematic (*maudhu'i*) framework, which is uniquely suited to bridging macro-environmental issues and micro-textual gender discourses by allowing cross-conceptual synthesis of disparate texts. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to construct an inclusive ecological paradigm rooted in Qur'anic values that transcends gender and social boundaries. By integrating Islamic environmental ethics with gender-inclusive perspectives, this study is expected to contribute to contemporary Qur'anic studies and strengthen the development of environmentally conscious and socially inclusive Islamic thought.

Methodology

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative library research design using the thematic (*maudhu'i*) approach to Qur'anic interpretation. The qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, ethical values, and contextual interpretations related to ecology and gender within Qur'anic discourse. The *maudhu'i* method was considered appropriate for systematically identifying and analyzing Qur'anic verses concerning environmental ethics, human stewardship (*khilāfah*), ecological balance, and gender equality (10). Recent developments in Qur'anic studies have also emphasized the importance of contextual and interdisciplinary approaches, specifically using historical-thematic mapping to interpret ancient scriptural commands in light of contemporary ecological emergencies (11).

To ensure text selection transparency, the verse corpus was isolated by filtering key terms related to environmental stewardship, creation cycles, and gender relations. The core selection parameters targeted verses containing the root concepts of *khilāfah* (stewardship), *mizān* (balance), *fasād* (destruction/corruption), *azwāj* (pairs/interdependence), and collective social duty (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf*).

Verses that did not directly link ecological maintenance with human behavioral accountability were excluded from the primary analytical framework. This specialized selection focus constitutes a deliberate boundary of our study design, ensuring an in-depth thematic focus rather than an exhaustive linguistic survey.

Data Sources and Materials

The primary data consisted of Qur'anic verses related to ecology, environmental preservation, human responsibility toward nature, and gender equality. Secondary data were obtained from contemporary scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and previous studies discussing ecofeminism, Islamic environmental ethics, gender discourse, and Qur'anic interpretation published between 2021 and 2025 (3–6). Contemporary Qur'anic commentaries, particularly *Tafsir Al-Misbah* and *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, were used as the main interpretative references to strengthen contextual analysis (12, 13). Recent scholarship in Qur'anic studies also highlights the increasing relevance of interdisciplinary and contextual methodologies in examining Qur'anic texts and contemporary issues (14, 15).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through systematic literature review procedures. Relevant Qur'anic verses and supporting literature were identified, classified, documented, and organized according to thematic relevance. The study additionally incorporated contextual perspectives derived from recent publications concerning Islamic ecological practices and women's participation in environmental conservation. All collected data were categorized into major analytical themes, including ecological ethics, environmental responsibility, gender equality, and sustainable environmental stewardship.

Data Analysis

The analytical process followed a thematic interpretation framework commonly applied in contemporary Qur'anic studies (10). The analysis consisted of four stages: (1) identifying major themes related to ecology and gender; (2) collecting and organizing relevant Qur'anic verses based on thematic and contextual relevance; (3) interpreting the verses by considering linguistic meaning, socio-historical context, and intertextual relationships; and (4) synthesizing the findings using descriptive-analytical techniques to formulate an inclusive ecological paradigm grounded in Qur'anic principles of justice, balance, sustainability, and shared responsibility between men and women. Recent methodological studies further emphasize that contextual interpretation is essential for addressing modern socio-environmental challenges within Qur'anic scholarship.

Ethical Considerations

This study relied exclusively on published literature and textual analysis; therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Qur'an constructs an inclusive ecological framework grounded in the principles of justice, balance (*mizān*), responsibility, and sustainability (16). The thematic interpretation of Qur'anic verses reveals that environmental preservation is not limited to one gender but constitutes a collective responsibility entrusted equally to men and women as *khalifah* on earth. The Qur'an consistently condemns destructive human behavior, exploitation of natural resources, and ecological imbalance as manifestations of moral and spiritual decline (17). This finding supports

recent studies emphasizing that Qur’anic ecological ethics position humans as moral agents responsible for maintaining harmony between humanity, nature, and God (18, 19). The thematic analysis further identified several Qur’anic verses that form the foundation of gender-oriented ecological ethics, as summarized in **Table 1**.

As shown in **Table 1**, the Qur’an consistently emphasizes shared ecological responsibility between men and women. The findings indicate that ecological preservation in Islam is deeply connected to ethical behavior, social justice, and collective participation. This perspective challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms that position nature merely as an object of domination while marginalizing women’s ecological roles. Instead, the Qur’an promotes a relational ecological ethic based on stewardship, compassion, and accountability. Such findings are consistent with contemporary ecofeminist studies arguing that ecological crises are closely related to social inequality and gender marginalization (20, 21).

The analysis also reveals that Qur’anic ecological values are closely associated with principles of cooperation, equality, and sustainability. These values provide a theological foundation for inclusive environmental ethics that encourage active participation from both men and women in environmental conservation efforts. Building directly upon the individual textual injunctions identified in **Table 1**, these scriptural commands crystallize into broader operational values. The

structural relationship between these core Qur’anic ecological values and their specific gender implications is presented in **Table 2**.

The inclusion of Q. S. Al-Ahzab 33: 35 in the thematic framework provides a vital theological foundation for this gender-inclusive ecological model. This verse explicitly enumerates the equal spiritual standing, duties, and rewards for both men and women. Within an ecotheological context, it underscores that covenantal responsibilities—such as ethical action, preservation of balance, and guarding moral integrity—are structurally identical for both genders, demonstrating that environmental accountability is a shared spiritual labor.

As summarized in **Table 2**, Qur’anic ecological ethics integrate environmental sustainability with gender equality, cooperation, and shared stewardship. The findings further demonstrate that women are not portrayed merely as complementary actors but as equally responsible agents in sustaining ecological balance and social resilience. This interpretation reinforces previous studies highlighting women’s strategic contributions in environmental activism and community-based ecological movements (3, 4). Furthermore, the concept of *ḥifẓ al-bi’ah* within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī’ah* strengthens the argument that environmental preservation constitutes a collective Islamic obligation shared equally by men and women (9).

In addition, the ecological principle of *azwāj* presented in **Table 3** further illustrates that the Qur’an

Table 1. Interpretation of ecological and gender-related Qur’anic verses.

Qur’anic Verse	Core Message	Contemporary Interpretation	Gender–Ecological Reflection
Q. S. Al-A’raf 7: 56	Prohibition of environmental destruction	Humans are prohibited from exploiting and damaging nature after its balance has been established	Men and women share equal responsibility as environmental stewards
Q. S. Ar-Rum 30: 41	Environmental destruction caused by human actions	Ecological crises emerge from greed and moral deviation	Ecological responsibility is collective and gender-inclusive
Q. S. Al-Baqarah 2: 30	Humans as khalifah on earth	Humans are entrusted with protecting and prospering the earth	Women possess equal ecological mandates
Q. S. At-Taubah 9: 71	Cooperation between believing men and women	Social responsibility requires collective participation	Men and women contribute equally to ecological sustainability
Q. S. An-Nahl 16: 97	Righteous deeds lead to a good life	Ethical actions create social and environmental harmony	Women are equally rewarded for ecological contributions

Table 2. Qur’anic ecological values and gender implications.

Qur’anic Values	Related Verses	Ecological Meaning	Gender Implication
Environmental protection	Al-A’raf 7: 56; Ar-Rum 30: 41	Humans are prohibited from damaging ecosystems	Men and women jointly protect the environment
Khilāfah (Stewardship)	Al-Baqarah 2: 30	Humans are entrusted with environmental responsibility	Women possess equal ecological authority
Righteous deeds	An-Nahl 16: 97; At-Taubah 9: 71	Environmental care is part of ethical conduct	Ecological merit is not gender-based
Equality and cooperation	Al-Ahzab 33: 35; At-Taubah 9: 71	Ecological sustainability requires collaboration	Gender equality strengthens environmental participation

emphasizes interdependence, harmony, and balance among all creations. The concept reflects that differences between men and women are not hierarchical but complementary, functioning together to maintain ecological and social sustainability. As shown in **Table 3**, natural systems such as the balance between land and sea, day and night, and the coordinated movement of celestial bodies symbolize the importance of cooperation and equilibrium within human relationships and environmental stewardship. This finding suggests that ecological sustainability in the Qur'anic perspective is closely related to the recognition of mutual dependence, equality of value, and shared responsibility between genders. This theological bridge connects cosmic dualities directly to human gender equity through the shared axis of *mizān* (cosmic balance). In the Qur'anic narrative, celestial cycles operate smoothly because their components—though distinct—cooperate without dominance. By extension, the *azwāj* principle establishes that human gender dynamics should reflect this cosmic equilibrium; differences between men and women are functional and complementary rather than hierarchical, meaning that environmental stewardship cannot succeed if one half of the pair is marginalized.

While **Table 2** outlines how these values delineate shared responsibilities, the systemic mechanism underpinning this collaboration is found in the broader metaphysical design of creation. The ecological principle of *azwāj* presented in **Table 3** further illustrates that the Qur'an emphasizes interdependence, harmony, and balance among all creations.

The discussion additionally indicates that the Qur'anic ecological paradigm extends beyond environmental conservation toward the reconstruction of ethical and spiritual consciousness. Environmental destruction is interpreted not merely as a physical crisis but also as a reflection of greed, injustice, and moral deviation. Consequently, ecological sustainability cannot be separated from social justice and gender equality (22). By integrating ecological ethics with gender-inclusive perspectives, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of gender-oriented ecology in the Qur'an and contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic environmental discourse.

To distinguish clearly between the operational values in **Table 2** and the cosmic principles in **Table 3**, the former outlines active human duties, while the latter represents the foundational structural balance of creation. Furthermore, this thematic reading directly dismantles patriarchal paradigms. For instance, the emphasis in Q. S. Al-Baqarah 2: 30 on *khilāfah* as a universal human appointment counters traditional gender-stratified assertions of dominance. By presenting stewardship as an equal, non-gendered spiritual mandate, the text re-centers

authority away from patriarchal ownership hierarchies and onto cooperative ecological accountability.

We acknowledge certain limitations in the scope of this study. As qualitative library research focused primarily on classical and contemporary textual hermeneutics, these findings do not address the empirical socioeconomic or localized political factors that influence policy implementation in specific Muslim-majority regions. Future research should combine these theological frameworks with empirical fieldwork to observe how these textual principles manifest in practice.

Conclusion

The Qur'an constructs an inclusive ecological paradigm that emphasizes environmental stewardship, ethical responsibility, and shared participation between men and women in preserving ecological balance. The findings demonstrate that gender equality and environmental sustainability are interconnected dimensions within Qur'anic teachings, particularly through the principles of *khilāfah*, *mizān*, and *ḥifẓ al-bi'ah*. Therefore, integrating Qur'anic ecological values into environmental governance and education may strengthen socially inclusive and sustainable environmental practices. To translate this paradigm into practice, policymakers should explicitly integrate religious assets and ecotheological principles into community environmental frameworks, ensuring equal representation of women in local governance. Additionally, ecological education curricula in Islamic institutions should incorporate gender-inclusive stewardship modules. Future research directions should investigate the practical application of the *ḥifẓ al-bi'ah* model through empirical case studies of grassroots environmental movements led by Muslim women.

Declaration

Author Information

Nurhalima Nurhalima

*Corresponding author

Department of Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Adab, Datokarama State Islamic University, Palu City, Indonesia.

Contribution: Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft.

Suraya Attamimi

Department of Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Adab, Datokarama State Islamic University, Palu City, Indonesia.

Contribution: Conceptualization, Funding Acquisition, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources,

Table 3. Ecological principles of Azwāj and their gender implications.

Principle	Ecological Illustration	Ecological and Gender Implication
Interdependence	Land and sea ecosystems support one another	Men and women complement each other in environmental preservation
Balance (<i>mizān</i>)	Day–night and natural cycles maintain harmony	Social balance requires equal gender recognition
Equality of value	The sun and moon possess distinct but equally important functions	No gender is superior; both contribute to sustainability

Supervision, Validation.

Muhammad Rafiyy Rahim

Department of Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Adab, Datokarama State Islamic University, Palu City, Indonesia.

Contribution: Conceptualization, Funding Acquisition, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

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