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Ecofeminist Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Synthesizing Amina Wadud and Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Responding to Anthropocentric Crisis in Asian Muslim Societies

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Abstract

The escalating global ecological crisis is deeply rooted in anthropocentric paradigms and exploitative patriarchal hierarchies, in which domination over nature often intersects with the marginalization of vulnerable groups, particularly women. Yet contemporary Qur'anic interpretation frequently addresses gender injustice and environmental degradation as separate concerns, limiting its capacity to confront their shared structural foundations. This article develops an ecofeminist Qur'anic hermeneutical framework as an alternative theological response to anthropocentric crisis in Asian Muslim societies, focusing on the Qur'anic concepts of *khalīfah*, *amānah*, and *mīzān*. Employing a qualitative library-based study and a hermeneutic-synthetic approach, the article integrates Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's spiritual ecotheology. The methodological tension between Wadud's emancipatory critique of patriarchal interpretation and Nasr's perennialist cosmology is mediated through an adapted Ricoeurian dialectic, combining egalitarian critique with a de-anthropocentrized understanding of cosmic sacredness. The analysis demonstrates that this synthesis produces an "egalitarian-theocentric" paradigm of Qur'anic interpretation. Wadud's tawhidic hermeneutics destabilizes hierarchical relations among human beings, while Nasr's conception of nature as a manifestation of divine signs challenges assumptions of human supremacy over the non-human world. Their integration reconstructs *khalīfah* not as a mandate of domination, but as a form of entrusted responsibility grounded in care, restraint, and accountability toward both human and ecological communities. The article argues that women's liberation and ecological preservation should be understood as interconnected expressions of *tawḥīd*. It contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by proposing a holistic interpretive framework in which gender justice and ecological justice constitute mutually reinforcing dimensions of ethical and social transformation.

Keywords: *Ecofeminist Qur'anic Hermeneutics; Amina Wadud and Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Anthropocentric Crisis; Gender and Ecological Justice*

INTRODUCTION

The escalating ecological crisis of the twenty-first century has exposed a deeper philosophical problem concerning how modern societies conceptualize the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Global warming, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and the depletion of natural resources increasingly reveal not merely technical

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or managerial failures but a crisis in the values through which nature is understood and governed (Bulkeley et al., 2023; Potts, 2020). Within critiques of the Capitalocene, ecological degradation has been linked to economic and epistemological systems that privilege limitless accumulation and reduce both human and non-human life to extractable resources (Moore, 2016). Such a worldview is sustained by an anthropocentric logic that assigns nature primarily instrumental value according to its usefulness for human interests. Ecofeminist scholarship further demonstrates that this logic of domination is intertwined with patriarchal structures that marginalize vulnerable groups, particularly women (Galić & Geiger, 2007; Hunnicutt, 2019). Environmental degradation is therefore neither socially neutral nor experienced equally. Women in resource-dependent communities, for example, may bear disproportionate burdens when ecological disruption increases responsibilities for securing water, food, and other household resources (Elum et al., 2021; Mala et al., 2026). From an ecofeminist perspective, gender injustice and environmental exploitation can thus be understood as interconnected manifestations of hierarchical modes of thought that legitimize domination over both marginalized human subjects and the non-human world (Goldstein, 2006).

This intersection is particularly relevant to contemporary Muslim societies in Asia, where questions of religious interpretation, social hierarchy, development, and environmental responsibility increasingly converge amid intensifying ecological crises. Recent evidence demonstrates that these concerns are not merely theoretical. Across Asia, extreme heat, destructive floods, and severe droughts increasingly threaten lives, livelihoods, food security, and ecosystems (Organization, 2026). The 2022 floods in Pakistan, for instance, affected approximately 33 million people and displaced around eight million, demonstrating the profound social consequences of climate-related disasters (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2023). Indonesia similarly faces recurrent floods, droughts, and forest and land fires. In 2023 alone, wildfires burned approximately 1.16 million hectares, while longer-term satellite analysis shows that fires cumulatively affected 5.62 million hectares between 2019 and 2024 (Gaveau et al., 2026; Reduction, 2024). This pattern has continued rather than subsided by June 2026. Significantly, such ecological pressures are not socially neutral. Research among female farmers in Indonesia shows that repeated exposure to drought increases vulnerability to food insecurity, particularly where limited economic and social resources constrain adaptive capacity (Samputra, 2025). Studies of flood-prone informal settlements in Jakarta similarly demonstrate how environmental hazards intersect with displacement and environmental injustice (Meshkani, 2024). These conditions reveal that ecological degradation is inseparable from questions of vulnerability, inequality, and social justice.

Islamic intellectual traditions offer substantial conceptual resources for such a project. Among contemporary Muslim thinkers, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has articulated one of the most influential critiques of the ecological consequences of modernity. For Nasr, environmental destruction reflects a profound spiritual crisis produced by the desacralization of nature under secular and reductionist conceptions of reality (Nasr, 1997). His spiritual ecotheology understands the cosmos not as inert matter but as a theophanic order in which natural phenomena disclose divine signs and participate in a sacred cosmic structure (Foltz, 2006). Nature therefore possesses significance beyond its economic or instrumental value, while humanity is called to preserve rather than disrupt the equilibrium of creation (Haq, 2001; Khalid, 2019). This framework offers a powerful theological critique of anthropocentrism by relocating human beings within a divinely ordered cosmos rather than positioning them

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above it. Nevertheless, Nasr's primary concern with restoring sacred cosmology leaves questions of social hierarchy comparatively underdeveloped. In particular, the relationship between ecological domination and gendered power receives limited systematic attention in his environmental thought. His perennialist treatment of masculine and feminine principles also raises questions concerning whether metaphysical complementarity alone can sufficiently address historically embedded structures of gender inequality (Kueny, 2018). Nasr's ecotheology therefore provides a sophisticated critique of human domination over nature, but its emancipatory potential requires further engagement with questions of power, equality, and gender within human societies.

A complementary but differently oriented critique emerges from contemporary Islamic feminist hermeneutics. Amina Wadud's *tawḥīdic* paradigm represents a major intervention in Qur'anic interpretation by challenging patriarchal assumptions embedded in historically male-dominated exegetical traditions (Wadud, 1999). Through a holistic reading of the Qur'an, Wadud places justice, reciprocity, and human equality within the theological unity of tawḥīd, rejecting interpretations that transform gender difference into an ontological hierarchy (Hidayatullah, 2014). Her approach destabilizes claims of male superiority by emphasizing that ultimate sovereignty belongs exclusively to God, thereby undermining theological justifications for the absolute domination of one human group over another (Ali, 2006; Barlas, 2019). The significance of Wadud's hermeneutics therefore extends beyond debates over women's legal and social status; it challenges the hierarchical logic through which religious interpretation can legitimize subordination. Yet the principal analytical orientation of her work remains centered on relations among human beings. Although the *tawḥīdic* paradigm does not inherently endorse anthropocentrism, its ecological implications have not been developed with the same conceptual depth as its critique of gender hierarchy (Majeed, 2021). Consequently, an important theoretical possibility remains insufficiently explored: whether the same theological logic that rejects patriarchal domination can also be extended to challenge human supremacy over the natural world.

The complementary strengths and limitations of Nasr and Wadud reveal a significant gap in contemporary Qur'anic and Islamic environmental scholarship. Studies inspired by Nasr have extensively explored sacred cosmology, Islamic environmental ethics, perennial philosophy, and critiques of modern science, yet gendered power relations rarely occupy a central position in this literature (Özdemir, 2008). Conversely, scholarship on Wadud and other Muslim feminist interpreters has predominantly focused on gender equality, religious authority, family law, leadership, and women's social and spiritual agency, while devoting considerably less attention to the ecological implications of *tawḥīdic* hermeneutics (Lamrabet & Francois-Cerrah, 2016; Shaikh, 2012). These two bodies of scholarship therefore interrogate different manifestations of hierarchical domination without sufficiently theorizing their conceptual interdependence. Nasr challenges the desacralization and instrumentalization of nature, whereas Wadud challenges patriarchal structures of interpretation and human relationships. Although scholars such as Ammar (2004) and Shaikh (2012) have opened important conversations among spirituality, gender, and environmental ethics, a systematic Qur'anic hermeneutical framework that critically integrates Islamic feminist interpretation with Islamic spiritual ecotheology remains underdeveloped. The gap is therefore not merely thematic but methodological: contemporary Islamic thought still requires an interpretive framework capable of examining gender hierarchy and anthropocentric domination within the same theological and ethical horizon.

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Bridging these two traditions, however, requires more than simply combining their normative commitments. Wadud's hermeneutics is fundamentally emancipatory, contextual, and critical of interpretive hierarchies, whereas Nasr's ecological thought is rooted in perennial metaphysics, sacred cosmology, and a hierarchical conception of the order of being. Their intellectual orientations therefore contain a productive methodological tension. A viable ecofeminist Qur'anic hermeneutics must preserve Wadud's critique of domination without reducing nature to an extension of human social concerns, while simultaneously drawing on Nasr's conception of cosmic sacredness without reproducing social hierarchies through metaphysical essentialism. Bringing these approaches into dialogue thus creates the possibility of a hermeneutic in which equality among human beings and humility before the more-than-human world become interconnected theological commitments.

Against this background, this study develops an ecofeminist Qur'anic hermeneutics through a critical synthesis of Amina Wadud's egalitarian *tawḥīdic* paradigm and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's spiritual ecotheology. It focuses on the Qur'anic concepts of *khalīfah, amānah*, and *mīzān* as key interpretive sites for reconsidering human responsibility beyond both patriarchal hierarchy and anthropocentric supremacy. Rather than assuming the compatibility of Wadud and Nasr, the study examines how their methodological differences can be brought into a productive hermeneutical dialogue. It asks how Wadud's critique of gender hierarchy can extend the ethical implications of Nasr's sacred cosmology, and conversely, how Nasr's decentering of human sovereignty can expand the ecological reach of Wadud's tawḥīdic hermeneutics. On this basis, the study proposes egalitarian theocentrism as an integrative paradigm in which tawḥīd simultaneously delegitimizes domination among human beings and decenters humanity's presumed supremacy over the non-human world. Within this framework, *khalīfah* is reconstructed not as authorization for mastery over the earth but as an entrusted responsibility governed by *amānah, mīzān*, care, restraint, and accountability. The article therefore contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by theorizing gender justice and ecological justice as mutually constitutive expressions of a *tawḥīdic* ethic and by offering a conceptual framework for ecological responsibility and social transformation in contemporary Asian Muslim societies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, library-based research design using a comparative hermeneutic approach. Library-based inquiry is particularly appropriate for theoretically oriented research that systematically identifies, evaluates, and interprets primary and secondary textual sources, while qualitative document analysis provides a systematic procedure for examining texts as sources of meaning and interpretation (Bowen, 2009; George, 2008). The primary sources consist of selected Qur'anic passages related to *tawḥīd, khalīfah*, *amānah*, and *mīzān*, together with major works by Amina Wadud and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Wadud's writings are examined to identify her *tawḥīdic* critique of patriarchal hierarchy, while Nasr's works are analyzed to reconstruct his spiritual ecotheology and critique of the desacralization of nature. Secondary literature on Qur'anic hermeneutics, Islamic feminism, ecofeminism, Islamic environmental ethics, and Asian Muslim societies is used to contextualize and critically assess both intellectual traditions.

The analysis proceeds through three stages. First, the study reconstructs Wadud's and Nasr's conceptual frameworks independently to preserve the internal logic and conceptual coherence of each thinker. Second, an ecofeminist analytical lens is used to identify points of convergence and tension between gender hierarchy and anthropocentric domination. This

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analytical perspective is informed by the ecofeminist proposition that the domination of women and the domination of nonhuman nature may be sustained by interconnected hierarchical and oppressive conceptual structures (Warren, 2000). Third, the study applies a hermeneutic synthesis inspired by Ricoeur's dialectic of understanding and explanation and his notion of appropriation, through which textual meaning is critically interpreted and brought into dialogue with contemporary contexts (Ricoeur, 1976, 1981). This procedure enables Wadud's egalitarian *tawḥīdic* hermeneutics and Nasr's sacred cosmology to be placed in a critical and constructive dialogue rather than simply combined.

Fazlur Rahman's double-movement method is used selectively to relate the moral principles of the selected Qur'anic concepts to contemporary ecological and gender concerns. This approach moves from an examination of the sociohistorical context and underlying moral principles of Qur'anic revelation toward the formulation of ethical principles applicable to changing contemporary circumstances (Rahman, 1982). Through this procedure, the study develops egalitarian theocentrism as a conceptual framework for interpreting gender justice and ecological justice as interconnected dimensions of Qur'anic ethics. Asian Muslim societies are treated as the contemporary interpretive context in which the relevance of this framework is assessed rather than as an empirically sampled population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tawḥīdic Equality and Sacred Cosmology: Two Complementary Critiques of Domination

The analysis reveals that Amina Wadud and Seyyed Hossein Nasr develop two distinct but theoretically complementary critiques of domination. Wadud approaches domination from the axis of intra-human hierarchy, particularly the patriarchal transformation of sexual difference into relations of superiority and subordination, whereas Nasr approaches it from the axis of human–nature relations, criticizing the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions that reduce the non-human world to an object of instrumental control (Wadud, 2005). Read comparatively, their projects expose two scales of the same normative problem: the conversion of difference into hierarchy and hierarchy into a justification for domination. This convergence is significant from an ecofeminist perspective, which identifies a "logic of domination" whereby conceptual distinctions become ethically problematic when they are organized into hierarchical oppositions that legitimate the subordination of one category by another (Warren, 2000). Wadud's tawḥīdic hermeneutics provides the first component of this critique by destabilizing theological justifications for hierarchical relations among human beings. Her reading of the Qur'an rejects the assumption that biological difference entails ontological or moral inequality. Tawḥīd, in this framework, is not merely a doctrinal assertion of divine unity but a normative principle that relativizes all human claims to absolute authority. Because ultimate sovereignty belongs to God alone, no human subject can transform contingent differences such as gender into an ontological mandate for unrestricted domination over another (Wadud, 2006). Tawḥīd therefore performs what may be described as an ontological leveling function: it places men and women within a shared condition of creatureliness, moral responsibility, and dependence upon God.

This egalitarian logic is particularly evident in Wadud's interpretation of Qur'anic creation narratives. Her reading of Q. 4:1 emphasizes humanity's common origin in nafs wāḥidah, while Q. 49:13 situates human plurality within a moral framework in which difference acquires ethical significance through *taqwā* rather than inherited status (Khoury & Mahfouz, 2023). These verses undermine the construction of gender difference as a vertical

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hierarchy and instead support a relational anthropology grounded in common origin, reciprocal moral agency, and accountability before God. The theoretical importance of Wadud's intervention therefore extends beyond the question of women's equality. It establishes a hermeneutical principle according to which difference cannot, by itself, authorize domination. Yet the ecological implications of this principle remain comparatively underdeveloped in Wadud's major works. Her interpretive project is primarily directed toward intra-human justice, particularly gender equality, patriarchal exegesis, interpretive authority, and women's moral agency (Bakar, 2018). This limitation should not be interpreted as evidence that her framework is necessarily anthropocentric. Rather, it reveals an unfinished ecological potential within *tawḥīdic* equality. If the unity and sovereignty of God prevent one class of human beings from absolutizing power over another, the same theological logic raises a further question: on what basis may humanity absolutize its authority over other forms of creation? In this sense, Wadud's critique can theoretically be extended from the rejection of androcentrism to a broader interrogation of anthropocentrism.

Nasr's spiritual ecotheology addresses precisely this second axis of domination. His diagnosis of the ecological crisis is not limited to environmentally destructive practices; it is fundamentally epistemological and metaphysical. For Nasr, modern ecological destruction originates in the desacralization of nature produced by an intellectual worldview that severs the cosmos from its transcendent source and reconstructs it as inert, measurable matter available for technological control and economic exploitation (Foltz, 2006; Nasr, 1997). Environmental degradation is therefore a symptom of a deeper disorder in the human understanding of reality. The crisis begins when nature ceases to be perceived as a manifestation of divine signs and is reduced to an object whose value is determined primarily by human utility. Against this reductionism, Nasr proposes a sacred cosmology in which the natural world participates in a divinely ordered reality. Qur'anic references such as Q. 17:44, which portrays all creation as praising God, and Q. 6:38, which describes non-human creatures as *umam*, destabilize a strictly anthropocentric ontology (Sayem, 2019a, 2019b). Nature is not religiously significant merely because it serves human welfare; it possesses theological meaning as part of a cosmos whose beings stand in their own relationship to the Creator. Nasr's cosmology thus shifts environmental ethics from an instrumental model of stewardship toward a more relational understanding of creation. Human beings may possess distinctive responsibilities, but these responsibilities do not confer unrestricted sovereignty over nature.

The theoretical force of Nasr's position lies in this decentering of human exceptionalism. Humanity is relocated from the position of autonomous master to that of a morally accountable participant within a larger sacred order. Such a move challenges the vertical ontology through which humanity is imagined as standing outside or above nature (Öztürk, 2026; Safdar & Shams-Ur-rehmam, 2021). It replaces this separation with a relational cosmology in which human and non-human existence is constituted within a shared dependence upon God. In ecofeminist terms, Nasr therefore helps dismantle the culture/nature hierarchy that often underlies the instrumental treatment of the ecological world. Nevertheless, Nasr's critique exhibits a limitation inverse to Wadud's. While his sacred cosmology offers a powerful challenge to anthropocentric domination, its implications for historically constituted social hierarchies are less systematically developed. Gender inequality, patriarchal authority, and unequal access to interpretive and institutional power do not occupy the same analytical centrality in his environmental thought. Moreover, his use of metaphysical categories of masculine and feminine complementarity raises a significant

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theoretical problem: symbolic complementarity at the cosmic level does not necessarily disrupt asymmetrical power relations at the social level (Kueny, 2018). A metaphysics of harmony can therefore remain normatively insufficient unless accompanied by a critical account of how hierarchy is historically produced and socially institutionalized.

The comparison consequently reveals what may be termed a complementary asymmetry. Wadud offers a strong horizontal critique of domination among human subjects but leaves its extension to human–nature relations largely implicit. Nasr offers a strong vertical and cosmological critique of humanity's domination over nature but provides a less developed analysis of gendered social hierarchy. This asymmetry is not merely a limitation of the two thinkers; it constitutes the theoretical point of departure for their productive synthesis (Buzov, 2007; Sayem, 2019b). Each framework identifies a domain of domination that the other treats less fully, while both ultimately challenge the absolutization of created power. Their convergence becomes clearer when *tawḥīd* and sacred cosmology are interpreted through a relational rather than hierarchical ontology. Wadud's *tawḥīdic* equality denies the legitimacy of ontological supremacy among human beings; Nasr's sacred cosmology denies the reduction of non-human creation to morally insignificant matter. Together, these positions permit a broader principle to be formulated: created difference does not constitute a theological license for domination. Gender difference cannot justify patriarchal supremacy, just as human distinctiveness cannot justify ecological mastery. Both human beings and the non-human world remain situated within an order whose ultimate center is neither man nor humanity as a species, but God (Tahir et al., 2026).

This theoretical convergence provides the first foundation for an ecofeminist Qur'anic hermeneutics. Rather than simply combining Islamic feminism with Islamic environmentalism, such a hermeneutics interrogates the common hierarchical logic through which both women and nature may be constructed as subordinate, available, or instrumental to a dominant subject. Its critical object is therefore not difference itself but the transformation of difference into hierarchy and hierarchy into domination. From this perspective, Wadud's critique of androcentrism and Nasr's critique of anthropocentrism can be synthesized into a theocentric critique of domination that simultaneously decenters male supremacy and human supremacy. The resulting framework opens the conceptual possibility of understanding gender justice and ecological justice not as separate ethical concerns, but as interconnected expressions of a Qur'anic moral order grounded in divine unity, creaturely interdependence, and the rejection of unjustified domination.

Egalitarian Theocentrism as an Ecofeminist Qur'anic Framework

The principal theoretical finding of this study is the formulation of egalitarian theocentrism as an ecofeminist Qur'anic framework emerging from a critical dialogue between Amina Wadud's *tawḥīdic* egalitarianism and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's sacred cosmology. The concept is proposed not as a simple combination of two intellectual traditions, nor on the assumption that Wadud and Nasr are philosophically identical. Their projects differ significantly in methodological orientation, intellectual genealogy, and primary objects of critique. Wadud reconstructs Qur'anic interpretation from the problem of gender hierarchy and patriarchal authority, whereas Nasr diagnoses the ecological crisis through the metaphysical displacement of the sacred from modern understandings of nature. The theoretical significance of bringing them into dialogue lies precisely in this difference. Each exposes a form of domination that remains comparatively underdeveloped in the other:

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Wadud interrogates hierarchy within human relations, while Nasr interrogates humanity's hierarchical positioning over the non-human world.

Egalitarian theocentrism therefore begins from a broader diagnosis: patriarchal domination and anthropocentric domination are neither identical nor reducible to one another, but they may operate through a comparable logic in which difference is converted into hierarchy and hierarchy into entitlement to control (Afsaruddin, 2022). This corresponds to the ecofeminist critique of the "logic of domination," whereby conceptual distinctions become oppressive when they are organized hierarchically and used to justify the subordination of one category by another (Warren, 2000). The relevant theological problem is thus not difference itself. The Qur'an repeatedly acknowledges differences among human beings and between forms of creation. The problem arises when difference is absolutized into superiority, and superiority is subsequently interpreted as a license for possession, exploitation, or unrestricted authority.

From Wadud, egalitarian theocentrism retains the proposition that *tawḥīd* has implications beyond doctrinal monotheism. If sovereignty in the ultimate sense belongs to God, human authority necessarily remains contingent, accountable, and limited. Within gender relations, this principle undermines claims that biological difference establishes an ontologically superior human class authorized to govern another without reciprocal moral accountability (Wadud, 1999). The *tawḥīdic* paradigm thereby performs a critical function: it prevents contingent human distinctions from being transformed into quasi-absolute hierarchies. Men and women remain differentiated human subjects, but both occupy the same fundamental position as creatures before God.

Nasr's sacred cosmology provides the second theoretical component of this framework. His critique of modernity demonstrates that ecological exploitation cannot be understood solely as a failure of environmental management. At a deeper level, it reflects an epistemological transformation through which nature is deprived of intrinsic sacred significance and reconstructed as measurable matter available for technological manipulation and economic extraction (Nasr, 1997). Once nature is perceived primarily as an assemblage of resources, instrumental value tends to displace relational, spiritual, and intrinsic forms of value. Nasr's cosmology challenges this reduction by restoring creation to a theological order in which non-human beings possess significance as manifestations of divine wisdom rather than merely as instruments of human welfare.

Yet egalitarian theocentrism modifies Nasr at an important point. Sacredness alone does not necessarily produce egalitarian social relations. A cosmology may affirm harmony, complementarity, and sacred order while leaving historically embedded forms of social hierarchy insufficiently interrogated (Fitzgerald, 2020). Wadud's critical hermeneutics therefore introduces into Nasr's cosmology a more explicit principle of non-domination. The question is not simply whether the cosmos is sacred, but how appeals to order, difference, or complementarity function when translated into social and ecological relations. If "order" legitimizes an unequal concentration of authority, or if "human stewardship" legitimizes unrestricted exploitation, theological language itself can become a mechanism for reproducing hierarchy (Heft, 2026). The synthesis therefore subjects both social and cosmological claims to a common normative test: does the interpretation preserve responsible differentiation, or does it convert difference into domination?

This synthesis produces what may be described as theocentric decentering. The term "theocentric" indicates that God, rather than man, humanity, or nature itself, constitutes the ultimate center of moral and ontological reference. "Egalitarian" does not imply that all beings

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are identical, possess equivalent capacities, or carry the same responsibilities (Varal, 2023). Rather, it rejects the inference that difference automatically establishes unrestricted superiority. Egalitarian theocentrism thus differs both from anthropocentrism and from a simplistic biocentric egalitarianism. It neither places humanity at the sovereign center of creation nor dissolves all distinctions between human and non-human beings. Instead, it situates differentiated beings within a shared order of creatureliness, dependence, and accountability before God. This distinction is particularly important for interpreting the Qur'anic concept of *khalīfah*. Anthropocentric readings can transform *khalīfah* into a theological authorization for human mastery over the earth (Sayem, 2023). Egalitarian theocentrism instead reads vicegerency through *amānah*: authority is fiduciary rather than proprietary. A trustee does not possess what is entrusted in an absolute sense; the trustee exercises conditional authority subject to the purpose and limits established by the entrusting authority. *Khalīfah* therefore denotes accountable agency rather than species sovereignty. When interpreted through *amānah*, human power becomes an ethical burden requiring preservation, restraint, and answerability rather than a privilege authorizing limitless extraction.

The concept of *mīzān* adds another dimension. Qur'anic balance should not be reduced to ecological equilibrium in a narrowly scientific sense. Within the proposed framework, *mīzān* functions as a relational norm regulating how power, consumption, responsibility, and dependence are distributed within creation. Environmental destruction represents a violation of *mīzān* when powerful actors externalize ecological costs onto vulnerable populations, future generations, other species, and ecosystems (Franco, 2019). Similarly, gender injustice violates relational balance when social structures disproportionately allocate vulnerability, restricted agency, or environmental burdens to particular groups. The synthesis consequently operates across three analytical levels. At the ontological level, all created beings are decentered before the sovereignty of God; no created subject possesses absolute sovereignty (McCann, 2012). At the ethical level, human distinctiveness generates responsibility, restraint, and accountability rather than an unrestricted right to domination. At the socio-ecological level, interpretations and institutions must be assessed according to whether they reproduce or resist relations in which vulnerability and environmental costs are asymmetrically imposed upon subordinated humans or the non-human world. These three levels distinguish egalitarian theocentrism from both purely metaphysical environmental theology and purely social theories of equality.

The framework can therefore be organized around four interconnected principles: theocentric decentering, ontological non-domination, fiduciary responsibility, and relational balance. Theocentric decentering denies any created subject the status of ultimate moral center. Ontological non-domination rejects the conversion of difference into a theological justification for supremacy. Fiduciary responsibility reconstructs *khalīfah* through *amānah*, converting power into accountable trusteeship. Relational balance interprets *mīzān* as a criterion for evaluating whether human, social, and ecological relations preserve justice, proportion, and the conditions of flourishing (Krause, 2013).

Table 1. Comparative Theoretical Framework of Wadud, Nasr, and Egalitarian Theocentrism

Dimension	Amina Wadud	Seyyed Hossein Nasr	Egalitarian Theocentrism
Primary problem	Patriarchal hierarchy and androcentric interpretation	Desacralization of nature and anthropocentric domination	Interlocking logics that convert difference into domination

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Dimension	Amina Wadud	Seyyed Hossein Nasr	Egalitarian Theocentrism
Human relationships	*Tawḥīdic* equality undermines gender-based superiority	Gender hierarchy is not a central analytical concern	Difference without unrestricted social domination
Human–nature relationship	Ecological implications remain largely implicit	Nature has sacred significance beyond instrumental utility	Human distinctiveness entails responsibility without ecological supremacy
Understanding of *tawḥīd*	Divine unity grounds human equality and moral agency	Divine unity underlies the sacred order of the cosmos	Divine sovereignty decenters both male and human claims to supremacy
Understanding of *khalīfah*	Not central to the gender critique	Human beings occupy a responsible position within sacred creation	Fiduciary agency rather than species sovereignty
Understanding of *amānah*	Moral accountability before God	Responsibility toward the sacred order	Entrusted power constrained by accountability and preservation
Understanding of *mīzān*	Compatible with justice and reciprocity	Expression of cosmic order and harmony	Relational balance linking social justice and ecological integrity
Main target of critique	Patriarchal authority	Modern reductionism and ecological exploitation	Social and ecological structures of unjustified domination
Normative criterion	Equality and moral reciprocity	Sacredness, restraint, and cosmic order	Non-domination, responsibility, relational justice, and restraint
Theoretical outcome	Egalitarian human anthropology	Non-reductionist sacred cosmology	A theocentric socio-ecological ethics of differentiated but non-dominating relations

This theoretical architecture also clarifies what egalitarian theocentrism does not claim. It does not posit ontological sameness between women and nature, humans and other species, or all forms of life. It does not regard all asymmetries as inherently unjust, since differences in capacity, responsibility, and relational position may remain ethically meaningful. Nor does it assume a causal equivalence between patriarchy and environmental destruction. Its argument is more precise: hierarchical systems become ethically suspect when differences are transformed into unaccountable power, when responsibility is reconstructed as privilege, and when the interests of dominant subjects systematically override the integrity or agency of subordinated beings (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Accordingly, the framework distinguishes differentiation from domination, a distinction that is essential because both gender ethics and environmental ethics require recognition of difference without allowing difference to become a justification for hierarchy. Equality does not require sameness, just as ecological responsibility does not require the denial of human moral particularity (Loder, 2025). What egalitarian theocentrism rejects is the hierarchical progression in which difference is converted into superiority, superiority into entitlement, and entitlement into domination. In its place, it proposes an alternative Qur'anic ethical sequence in which *tawḥīd* leads to

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shared creatureliness, shared creatureliness to differentiated responsibility, differentiated responsibility to *amānah*, *amānah* to relational restraint, and relational restraint to *mīzān*. This sequence constitutes the central theoretical intervention of the study. *Tawḥīd* establishes that ultimate sovereignty belongs to God; shared creatureliness relativizes claims of absolute created superiority; differentiated responsibility recognizes human agency without converting it into supremacy; *amānah* frames such agency as accountable trusteeship; relational restraint limits the exercise of power; and *mīzān* provides the normative horizon within which social and ecological relationships should remain just, balanced, and proportionate.

Egalitarian theocentrism thus relocates both gender justice and ecological justice within a single theological grammar. God rather than masculinity becomes the center of social authority; God rather than humanity becomes the center of cosmological value. Human beings remain active moral agents, but their agency is bounded by accountability, reciprocity, restraint, and the integrity of creation. In this sense, the synthesis advances beyond both Wadud and Nasr individually: it extends Wadud's critique of hierarchy across the human–nature boundary while simultaneously bringing Nasr's sacred cosmology under a more explicit criterion of social equality and non-domination. The resulting framework understands gender justice and ecological justice as distinct but interconnected expressions of a Qur'anic ethical order in which difference generates responsibility rather than supremacy, and power is legitimate only when exercised as accountable care rather than domination.

From Tawḥīdic Equality to a Hermeneutics of Non-Domination

The synthesis developed in this study contributes to contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics by moving beyond issue-specific interpretation toward what may be described as a hermeneutics of non-domination. Islamic feminist interpretation has generated sophisticated critiques of androcentric exegesis, patriarchal authority, and gendered asymmetries in the interpretation of scripture, while Islamic environmental thought has increasingly challenged the desacralization of nature, ecological exploitation, and anthropocentric conceptions of human mastery (Bakhshizadeh, 2023). Egalitarian theocentrism brings these trajectories into a single theological framework by shifting the interpretive question from the isolated status of women or nature to the broader problem of how power is constructed, justified, limited, and exercised under divine sovereignty. The central object of interpretation therefore becomes not difference itself, but the conditions under which difference is transformed into hierarchy and hierarchy into domination.

A hermeneutics of non-domination begins from the distinction between moral responsibility and ontological supremacy (Almeida & Elias, 2014). The Qur'an may ascribe distinctive capacities, obligations, and forms of accountability to human beings, yet these distinctions do not necessarily authorize unrestricted power over other human beings or the non-human world. The interpretive error arises when responsibility is converted into privilege, stewardship into ownership, difference into superiority, or authority into entitlement. In this sense, egalitarian theocentrism introduces a critical hermeneutical test: whenever an interpretation grants one subject expansive power over another, the relevant question is not merely whether such power can be textually justified, but whether it remains bounded by accountability, reciprocity, justice, and the integrity of the created order as stated by Pedersen (2022).

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Nasr's sacred cosmology strengthens this argument by challenging the reduction of nature to morally neutral matter (Safdar & Shams-Ur-rehmam, 2021). If creation functions as a field of divine signs, then the natural world cannot be treated solely as an object of economic utility or technological control. Its value cannot be exhausted by human interests because its meaning is embedded within a theological order that precedes human use. Wadud's *tawḥīdic* hermeneutics, however, introduces a necessary corrective to cosmological approaches that emphasize harmony, order, and complementarity without sufficiently interrogating asymmetrical power. Her critique prevents such concepts from being used to naturalize patriarchal arrangements or to convert symbolic difference into social subordination. The combined framework therefore establishes a double hermeneutical movement: Nasr limits anthropocentric domination by re-sacralizing the non-human world, while Wadud limits social domination by subjecting claims of authority to *tawḥīdic* equality. This convergence becomes especially significant through the Qur'anic concept of *mīzān*. In environmental discourse, *mīzān* is often interpreted in terms of ecological balance, while in ethical and social discourse justice is discussed through a separate vocabulary (Özdemir, 2026). Egalitarian theocentrism reconnects these domains by treating *mīzān* as a normative principle governing the proper limits of power and relational proportion. Balance, in this sense, is not merely a static condition of cosmic order but a moral requirement that relationships remain proportionate, accountable, and non-exploitative. Ecological destruction violates *mīzān* when human extraction exceeds the regenerative capacity and integrity of ecosystems; patriarchal domination violates *mīzān* when asymmetries of authority become structurally excessive and deprive other moral agents of dignity, participation, or agency (Zhang, 2025). Social and ecological imbalance thus become different manifestations of a more fundamental failure to respect relational limits.

Such a reading also reframes *amānah*. If *amānah* denotes entrusted responsibility, then the exercise of power must remain accountable to purposes that exceed the interests of the actor who holds that power. The ethical subject is therefore not sovereign in an absolute sense but fiduciary (Claassen, 2025). This has direct implications for both gender and ecology. Authority in human relationships cannot legitimately become domination because it remains accountable to justice, dignity, and reciprocity; similarly, human authority over the earth cannot become unrestricted appropriation because it remains accountable to preservation, restraint, and the integrity of creation (Löschke, 2015). *Amānah* thus functions as a bridge between social ethics and ecological ethics by converting power from a right of possession into a burden of responsibility. The resulting hermeneutic therefore operates through a sequence of normative questions. First, what form of difference is being identified by the text or interpretation? Second, how is that difference translated into authority? Third, does the resulting authority remain accountable and proportionate, or does it become structurally excessive? Fourth, who bears the costs of that excess? Finally, does the interpretation preserve *mīzān* or otherwise? These questions make the hermeneutics of non-domination more than a theological slogan; they transform it into an analytical procedure for evaluating interpretive claims concerning gender, social hierarchy, environmental use, and human responsibility.

The conceptual innovation of this study lies not in claiming that the Qur'an directly articulates contemporary ecofeminism, but in demonstrating that a critical dialogue among Qur'anic concepts, Islamic feminist hermeneutics, and Islamic ecotheology can generate a coherent interpretive grammar for contemporary questions of gender, ecology, and power (Amin et al., 2025). This grammar is grounded in the proposition that divine sovereignty relativizes all created claims to absolute authority and gives rise to a normative sequence in

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which divine sovereignty leads to shared creatureliness, shared creatureliness to differentiated responsibility, differentiated responsibility to entrusted authority, entrusted authority to relational restraint, and relational restraint to social and ecological justice. This sequence reframes Qur'anic ethics by placing the regulation of power at the center of interpretation: divine sovereignty establishes the ultimate limit on created authority; shared creatureliness undermines claims to absolute ontological supremacy; differentiated responsibility recognizes distinct moral capacities without converting them into domination; entrusted authority frames human agency through *amānah* rather than possession; relational restraint prevents authority from becoming *ṭughyān*; and social and ecological justice represent the normative realization of *mīzān* (Heck, 2021).

The broader significance of this move is that it transforms *tawḥīd* from a primarily doctrinal or anthropological principle into a critical hermeneutical criterion. *Tawḥīd* does not merely establish that God is one; it destabilizes every attempt by created beings to occupy a quasi-sovereign position. It therefore functions simultaneously as a critique of male supremacy, species supremacy, and any form of power that exceeds the limits of entrusted responsibility. A hermeneutics of non-domination may thus be understood as the interpretive expression of egalitarian theocentrism: because sovereignty ultimately belongs to God, created power is legitimate only when it remains limited, accountable, relational, and non-dominating. The resulting contribution is therefore methodological as well as normative. Methodologically, it offers a way of reading Qur'anic concepts through the question of how power is organized and restrained. Normatively, it proposes that justice cannot be adequately assessed only through formal equality or environmental preservation in isolation. Justice must also be evaluated by whether relationships reproduce domination, whether authority remains accountable, and whether the costs of social and ecological arrangements are imposed disproportionately on vulnerable subjects. In this sense, the hermeneutics of non-domination provides a framework through which Qur'anic ethics can address contemporary crises of gender, ecology, and power without reducing them to a single social problem or detaching them from their theological foundations.

Relevance for Asian Muslim Societies

Egalitarian theocentrism is particularly relevant to contemporary Asian Muslim societies, where ecological vulnerability, development, livelihood, religious interpretation, and gendered social structures frequently intersect. Because this study is conceptual rather than empirical, however, Asian Muslim societies are not treated as a homogeneous category. Rather, the framework provides a normative framework for examining diverse social-ecological contexts shaped by different political economies, environmental exposures, social structures, and interpretive traditions. Environmental change is rarely experienced independently of existing inequalities. Resource extraction, land conversion, deforestation, water scarcity, agricultural disruption, flooding, drought, and energy-transition projects distribute benefits and burdens unevenly across communities. Egalitarian theocentrism therefore evaluates ecological questions through a multidimensional conception of justice involving distribution, participation, and recognition. Environmental governance becomes ethically problematic when ecological costs are disproportionately imposed on groups with limited access to resources, decision-making, or political power (Adom et al., 2025; Hamzani et al., 2025).

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This perspective is especially relevant to gender analysis. Ecological vulnerability should not be understood as inherently feminine; rather, it becomes gendered through unequal access to land, water, income, mobility, political participation, and socially differentiated responsibilities for household and care work (Mahmud & Abdullah, 2026). The ecofeminist significance of environmental disruption therefore lies not in identifying women with nature but in examining how ecological pressures interact with pre-existing structures of social power and produce differentiated vulnerability. Environmental struggles involving rural women in Indonesia, including those associated with the Kendeng Mountains, illustrate the kinds of social-ecological conflicts to which this framework may be applied (Ekawati et al., 2025; Endrayadi et al., 2024). Beyond such land-use conflicts, recurrent forest and peatland fires in Kalimantan further demonstrate how ecological degradation can intersect with livelihood insecurity, public health risks, resource governance, and unequal social vulnerability (Prathama, 2026). Such cases connect questions of land, water, livelihood, ecological preservation, development, and political agency. They do not empirically verify egalitarian theocentrism, but they demonstrate why ecological justice cannot always be separated from social and gender justice.

The same reasoning applies to green development and energy transition. Fritz and Eversberg (2023) and Muhsina (2025) stated that a policy cannot be considered just merely because it is environmentally sustainable if its implementation produces displacement, livelihood loss, or unequal participation. Egalitarian theocentrism therefore distinguishes ecological transition from just ecological transition, requiring ecological integrity, fair distribution of burdens and benefits, meaningful participation, and recognition of affected communities to be evaluated simultaneously. Within this framework, *amānah, mīzān,* and *ṭughyān* provide a theological grammar for environmental governance (Khoury & Mahfouz, 2023; Wadud, 1999). *Amānah* frames authority over land and natural resources as entrusted responsibility rather than unrestricted ownership; *mīzān* requires proportionality among development, ecological integrity, livelihood, and social justice; and *ṭughyān* identifies the point at which legitimate human agency becomes excessive and unaccountable domination. Reinterpreting *khalīfah* through these concepts shifts vicegerency from mastery toward accountable trusteeship.

For Asian Muslim societies, the significance of egalitarian theocentrism therefore lies not in offering a universal Islamic solution to heterogeneous environmental problems, but in providing a theological framework for asking whether development is ecologically sustainable, socially just, participatory, and morally constrained. Its central proposition is that ecological responsibility becomes normatively adequate only when joined to accountability, proportionality, participation, and non-domination. In this way, *khalīfah, amānah,* and *mīzān* become interconnected elements of a broader Qur'anic ethic of social-ecological justice.

CONCLUSSION

This study demonstrates that a productive dialogue between Amina Wadud's *tawḥīdic* hermeneutics and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's sacred cosmology can generate a more integrated Qur'anic framework for addressing the interconnected problems of gender hierarchy, anthropocentrism, and ecological degradation. Rather than treating Islamic feminism and Islamic ecotheology as separate intellectual projects, the study formulates egalitarian theocentrism as a critical synthesis in which divine sovereignty limits both intra-human domination and humanity's claim to unrestricted authority over the non-human world. Wadud's critique of patriarchal hierarchy contributes the principle that difference cannot

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legitimately be transformed into ontological superiority, while Nasr's sacralization of nature challenges the reduction of creation to instrumental value. Their integration therefore establishes a theological basis for distinguishing legitimate responsibility from domination. The framework further reconstructs *khalīfah* through *amānah* and *mīzān*, thereby redefining human agency as entrusted, accountable, and morally constrained rather than proprietary or sovereign. Within this framework, human distinctiveness entails intensified responsibility rather than expanded entitlement, while *mīzān* provides the normative horizon for maintaining proportionate and just social-ecological relations. This reconstruction leads to a hermeneutics of non-domination, in which the central interpretive question is whether difference is converted into superiority, responsibility into privilege, or authority into uncontrolled power. Gender justice and ecological justice consequently emerge as distinct but interconnected expressions of the same Qur'anic demand that created power remain subject to divine sovereignty, accountability, restraint, and justice.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study therefore lies not in claiming that the Qur'an directly articulates contemporary ecofeminism, but in demonstrating how Qur'anic concepts, Islamic feminist hermeneutics, and Islamic ecotheology can be brought into a coherent interpretive grammar for analyzing power. For contemporary Asian Muslim societies, this framework offers a theological vocabulary for examining environmental degradation, development, livelihood insecurity, gendered vulnerability, and ecological transition without homogenizing their diverse social contexts. At the same time, the framework remains conceptual and hermeneutical rather than empirically verified. Future research should therefore examine its relevance in lived contexts such as Muslim environmental movements, women-led ecological initiatives, rural communities, land and water conflicts, and energy-transition projects across South and Southeast Asia. Such empirical engagement would help assess whether egalitarian theocentrism can develop from a Qur'anic hermeneutical proposition into a broader analytical framework for social-ecological justice.

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