



Living Sufism and Ecological Ethics: Integrating Spiritual Values and Local Wisdom in Environmental Conservation of Nagari Paninggahan, West Sumatra

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Abstract: Nagari Paninggahan is well known for preserving Minangkabau traditions that integrate Islamic teachings, customary law, and sustainable natural resource management. This study examines how Sufi values are embedded in local customs and their role in environmental conservation. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving community leaders, village officials, and local residents. The findings reveal that traditions such as *Lubuk Larangan* and *Balimau* promote ecological ethics by regarding forests, rivers, fisheries, and agricultural ecosystems as sacred trusts (*amanah*) entrusted by God. This spiritual perspective encourages environmental responsibility, limits resource exploitation, and reinforces sustainable practices. The study concludes that the integration of Sufi spirituality and Minangkabau customary traditions contributes significantly to ecological sustainability while preserving local cultural identity and strengthening community-based environmental stewardship.

Contribution: This study provides insight into Sufism's role in fostering environmental awareness, promoting harmony between humans and nature, and maintaining cultural identity.

Keywords: living Sufism; local wisdom; Minangkabau; West Sumatra; environmental conservation.

Introduction

Sufism emphasizes the ontological unity between humans and nature. In the Sufi perspective, all creation reflects the Divine presence. Nature is not viewed as a separate material object from God but as living signs of God. Recognizing this unity fosters a spiritual attitude toward nature, where every action toward the environment is regarded as an act of worship and obedience to the divine will. Therefore, respect for nature becomes a form of worship. The principle of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) teaches that harming nature is a form of wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) against God's creation. Consequently, Sufism provides a theological foundation for ecological ethics grounded in spiritual awareness.¹

Sufism instills spiritual awareness of nature as a reflection of the self. In the Sufi tradition, humans are viewed as a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm. This means that damage to nature actually reflects spiritual damage within humans. This awareness leads to a moral responsibility to maintain both inner and ecological balance. Thus, purification of the soul (*tazkiyyat al-nafs*) not only affects individual morality but also collective ecological behavior. Environmental stewardship becomes part of the spiritual journey towards self-perfection (*insān kāmil*).²

In the Indonesian context, religious traditions in many regions, including Minangkabau of West Sumatra, have strong Sufi roots. Values such as simplicity, mutual cooperation, and respect for nature coexist with the Sufi teachings and *tariqa*. This aligns with the eco-spirituality paradigm, which is now widely developed in global environmental studies. Thus, Sufism is not only theoretically relevant but also applicable in Muslim community-based conservation efforts.³ The practice of living Sufism in forest conservation in Nagari Paninggahan (village) around Lake Singkarak involves classifying the forest into two parts. The first classification is *Rimbo Tuo*, a protected forest that serves as a conservation area for the survival of the surrounding community, especially to preserve water sources and maintain biodiversity. The second classification is *Palak*, which is used for economic interests and family needs, but its use remains reasonable and does not exploit it excessively.

¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 150.

² William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 225.

³ Richard C. Foltz, Frederick Mathewson Denny, and Azizan Haji Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 85–105.

Nagari Paninggahan, one of the nagaris (villages) in West Sumatra, offers a concrete example of how Sufism can live and thrive within a rural community, with all its local dynamics. In this village, Sufism is not only seen as a personal spiritual path but also as an important element in building and maintaining social cohesion. In this nagari, rituals to maintain the forest, prohibitions on taking wood from sacred zones, and rituals to cleanse water sources are led by Sufi scholars. These forms are structured through metaphorical proverbs (*petitih*) and nagari institutions, thereby becoming collective mechanisms for preserving biodiversity and water supplies. The practices of God remembrance (*dhikr*) and communal prayer at water sources imbue ecological functions with spiritual meaning, rendering them both sacred and ecological acts. Local Sufi pesantren and Islamic educational forum (*majelis taklim*) produce ethical narratives about humility (*tawadū'*) towards nature, which are translated into rules for land use and fishing. Collaboration among adat, Sufi scholars, and Nagari policies facilitates restoration, reforestation, and fishery management initiatives in Lake Singkarak on the outskirts of Paninggahan. Integrating religious and adat norms strengthens sustainability and confers high social legitimacy. Thus, Sufism in the local context functions not only as individual spirituality but also as a collective ethic that guides environmental action. Implicitly, conservation approaches rooted in living practices (living Sufism) tend to be more resistant to destructive economic changes. In short, conservation in Paninggahan is the product of concrete and institutionalized hybrid religious-cultural practices.

Empirical studies on living Sufism have so far focused on the dimensions of personal spirituality, Sufi orders, and religious rituals in urban spaces and pesantrens, rather than on ecological and local cultural contexts. Research by Howell,⁴ Feener,⁵ and Irawan⁶ shows that living Sufism shapes social ethics, but has not yet discussed how Sufi values regulate nature conservation practices. Several studies on eco-Islam highlight the normative relationship between humans and nature.⁷ But they remain theological in nature and lack

⁴ Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001): 701–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700107>.

⁵ R. Michael Feener, *Islam in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 87–88.

⁶ Bambang Irawan, "Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren), Sufism and Environmental Conservation Practices in Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (March 29, 2022): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7073>.

⁷ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 115.

ethnographic evidence at the community level. Meanwhile, research on the Minangkabau local wisdom⁸ emphasizes aspects of customs and social structures, without linking them to Sufi practices. Therefore, there is a research gap in integrating living Sufism, Islamic ecological ethics, and customary conservation practices at the nagari level. The context of Nagari Paninggahan offers a unique empirical field because Sufi spirituality is intertwined with Minangkabau customs and environmental management. Thus, this study examines how Sufi values are integrated into customary rules and how this integration influences the effectiveness of natural resource preservation and conservation. This study argues that integrating Minangkabau custom with Sufi teaching produces a spirituality-based eco-ethical governance in which customary law serves as a vehicle for the practice of Sufi values. The Paninggahan model offers a new paradigm for Islamic ecotheology, not universal teachings but a value system born of local context and community experience.

Literature Review

Living Sufism and Ecological Ethics

The term “living Sufism” stems from a broader idea, living Islam. Living Islam has been described as “Islam that exists within society” or “Islamic life within society.” This term arose as a way to present Islam based on factual realities in the public domain, rather than merely as a doctrine. It resonates with two often contrasted concepts: textual versus contextual, and normative versus historical. Several authors, including Akbar S. Ahmad, Magnus Marsden, Herry Nurdi, and Fida Sanjakdar, have contributed to developing the concept of living Islam. Their works suggest that living Islam reflects the everyday practice of Islam—what might be called Islam Today—in a specific space and time.⁹

From this term emerged the concept of the living Qur'an, understood as the meaning that society gives to the Qur'an and how this meaning is actualized. In other words, it is the “living Qur'an,” the Qur'an that manifests itself in their daily lives.¹⁰ There is also the concept of living sunnah, which

⁸ M. Edi, *Adat Dan Etika Lingkungan Di Minangkabau: Kajian Terhadap Sistem Larangan Dan Pantang Nagari* (Padang: Universitas Andalas Press, 2018), 50.

⁹ H. Zuhri, “Living Islam: Apa Dan Mau Ke Mana?,” *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 1, no. 1 (2018): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v1i1.1530>.

¹⁰ Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra, “The Living Qur’ān: Beberapa Perspektif Antropologi,” *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 20, no. 1 (2012): 235–60, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.20.1.198>.

Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), its initiator, refers to as a concept of behavioral law, both physical and mental. As he stated, "What we want now to do is recast hadith into living Sunnah terms through historical interpretation so that we may be able to derive norms from it for ourselves through an adequate ethical theory and its legal re-embodiment."¹¹ This shows that when a concept is juxtaposed with the term living, it expresses a phenomenon currently happening, being experienced, lived, or brought to life by a community.

Then, what about the term "living Sufism"? Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his book, argues that "living Sufism" covers the ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects of Sufism. It describes the multiple aspects of Sufism, ranging from its historical dimensions and the growth of Islamic mysticism to the essence of Muslim spirituality and Sufi metaphysics. Nasr also portrays the important position and role of Sufi teachers as revealed in Persian Sufi literature. He also emphasizes the significance of Sufism in the modern era and touches on Western scholars' interest in their studies of Islamic mysticism. With that in mind, living Sufism can be interpreted as Sufi thought and practice carried out by Muslim communities.

While Nicolaas H. Biegan explains that Sufism is quite different from the religious fundamentalism it is often accused of, it has become a subject of interest among intellectuals. According to him, Sufis across the Islamic world are open-minded, tolerant, and nonviolent, aiming to connect with God through various means such as rituals, poetry, music, and dance. He has long studied and documented Sufi practices through photography and observation in countries like Egypt, Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia. In the accompanying texts, Biegan delves into the motives behind these rituals and sheds light on different aspects of Sufi life and practices across diverse settings. This book demonstrates that living Sufism is a dynamic phenomenon shaped by how society at a particular time perceives and practices it.¹²

Sufism not only serves as an individual spiritual path but also carries ethical implications for the environment. The concept of unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*) emphasizes the connection between humans and nature as a manifestation of God's presence. From an environmental ethics perspective, Sufism teaches cosmic awareness, holding that damage to nature is a betrayal

¹¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1965), 95–97.

¹² Nicolaas Biegan, *Living Sufism: Sufi Rituals in the Middle East and the Balkans* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 65.

of God's trust. In practice, Sufi values such as simplicity (*zuhd*), gratitude, and harmony form the basis for building sustainable environmental ethics amid the modern ecological crisis. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes the importance of reviving Islamic spirituality through Sufism as a solution to the crises of modernity, whether moral, social, or ecological. Nasr proposes a "living Sufism" approach that places Sufi values not only in the realm of ritual, but also in everyday social life. This is evident in his conception of the perennial philosophy, which emphasizes the connection among religious tradition, spiritual wisdom, and ecological living. Nasr's Living Sufism provides a theoretical framework for understanding Muslims' interaction with modernity without losing their spiritual roots.¹³

Living Sufism and ecological ethics developed from the awareness that Islamic spirituality is not only theocentric but also cosmocentric. In the context of Living Sufism, Sufism's teachings are understood not merely as mystical texts but as life practices that animate society's daily relationships with God, fellow humans, and nature.¹⁴ Nasr asserts that, from a Sufi perspective, nature is a manifestation of God (*tajallī*), so destroying nature is desecrating divine signs. Therefore, ecological awareness in Sufism is rooted in the principle of *tawḥīd*, which connects God, humanity, and nature in an ontological unity.¹⁵ This perspective serves as the theoretical basis for the notion that environmental preservation actualizes monotheism and ecological worship.

William C. Chittick expands on Nasr's thinking by emphasizing that Sufism teaches the relationship between humans and nature through the concepts of *'ayn al-yaqīn* (vision of the true nature) and *ma'rifa* (inner knowledge). In Chittick's view, humans who attain *ma'rifa* will not treat nature as an object of exploitation, but rather as a symbol that reveals the essence of divinity. Nature is understood as the "second book" after the Qur'an, which must be read with a clear heart.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman offers an ethical and rational approach to the relationship between humans and nature through the concept of moral idealism in Islam. Rahman emphasizes that Islamic ethics is rooted in the *maqāṣid al-*

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Naṣr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007), 100.

¹⁴ Naṣr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 40–42.

¹⁵ Naṣr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, 79–80.

¹⁶ Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, 234.

sharī‘ah (moral objectives of sharia), which demands a balance between human interests and the sustainability of nature. According to him, humans are caliphs entrusted with preserving the earth, not exploiting it. Ecological ethics, within Rahman's framework, emphasizes that Islamic spirituality must be translated into social actions and policies that are just toward nature.¹⁷ Thus, the integration of living Sufism and ecological ethics does not end at personal mystical experience but becomes a social practice grounded in spiritual values.¹⁸ From these three figures, it can be concluded that living Sufism presents a spiritual dimension that brings ecological ethics to life through direct experience of the Divine presence in the universe. Nasr emphasizes the sanctity of nature as a reflection of God; Chittick highlights the inner experience that fosters empathy for nature; and Rahman connects spiritual values with social ethics and ecological morals.

Method

This research is a qualitative field study using ethnography and anthropological approach.¹⁹ The purpose of this study is to explore and explain how Sufi values are integrated into the daily lives of the Nagari Paninggahan community. This approach was chosen to understand the research subjects' cultural practices and experiences in depth, in the context of their social lives. Primary data were collected through observations of cultural practices within Minangkabau local wisdom, documentation of these practices, and in-depth interviews with community leaders, religious scholars, village officials, and local residents. Meanwhile, secondary data consists of books, research, and articles related to living Sufism.

To ensure data reliability, this study employed triangulation of sources and methods. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results from various informant categories, while method triangulation was achieved by combining in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. This step aims to ensure that research findings are not

¹⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 112.

¹⁸ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 231.

¹⁹ Taniya Roberts, "Understanding Ethnography," *British Journal of Midwifery* 17, no. 5 (2009): 291–94, <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjom.2009.17.5.42220>.

dependent on a single data source but are confirmed by multiple, complementary perspectives.²⁰

Ethical considerations were also a primary concern in this research. Each interview and observation was conducted with the official permission of the village government and the relevant religious institutions. Informants were provided with an explanation of the research's purpose, benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained, both written and verbal, while guaranteeing confidentiality and respecting customary values and religious norms prevailing in Paninggahan Village. Thus, this research is not only oriented toward scientific findings but also based on ethical principles of humanistic and civilized social research.

Data were analyzed using descriptive methods, producing narrative descriptions in the form of observed speech, behavior, and activities, explaining the forms of application, elements of living Sufism, and the community's geographical and ethnocentric context. In addition, analysis is carried out by interpreting the symbolic meanings, social practices, and values that arise in the community's practices. This approach aligns with Clifford Geertz's view that culture is a system of meaning that must be understood through thick description.²¹ Through this analysis, the research not only describes the observed cultural practices but also interprets the meanings and value structures that shape them.

Recent anthropological studies have also highlighted the fluid and evolving nature of relationships and cultural linkages among communities inhabiting regions that were once part of broad zones of interaction, but later became separated by imperial and national borders, as well as by the ideological tensions of the Cold War.²²

²⁰ Roberta Heale and Dorothy Forbes, "Understanding Triangulation in Research," *Evidence Based Nursing* 16, no. 4 (2013): 98–98, <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2013-101494>.

²¹ Peter Brooks, "Semiotics and Thick Description (Barthes and Geertz)," in *Interpreting Clifford Geertz* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 9–16, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230118980_2.

²² Magnus Marsden and David Henig, "Muslim Circulations and Networks in West Asia: Ethnographic Perspectives on Transregional Connectivity," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 10, 2019): 11–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366518814668>.

Results and Discussion

The Manifestation of Living Sufism in Nagari Paninggahan

Nagari Paninggahan, a village in Junjung Sirih District, Solok Regency, West Sumatra, is actively enhancing its appeal. It is renowned for Bilih fish and other high-quality agricultural products in Solok. The surrounding forests are vital to both economic and ecological sustainability, earning Nagari Paninggahan a reputation as a leading producer of carbon credits. The local community has long relied on indigenous wisdom to protect and preserve its environment. The term "Nagari" refers to a village-level area in West Sumatra, situated on the edge of Lake Singkarak. Solok Regency is famous for its rich natural tourism potential, including Lakes Singkarak, Twin Lakes, and Lake Talang.²³

Manifestation of living Sufism in Nagari Paninggahan and the globalization of redemptive sociality in transnational Sufi networks such as al-Ahbash and Haqqaniyya reflects a dynamic interplay between local religious practices and global spiritual movements. In Nagari Paninggahan, living Sufism is expressed through rituals, communal traditions, and spiritual values that foster strong social cohesion and culturally embedded religious life. Meanwhile, the transnational expansion of al-Ahbash and Haqqaniyya across West Asia and Central and Eastern Europe demonstrates how Sufi traditions adapt to modernity through cross-border networks, mobility, and global religious outreach.²⁴ Both contexts emphasize the social dimension of Sufism as a means of moral transformation and the reconstruction of harmonious social relations. At the local level, Sufism reinforces the integration of tradition and religion, while at the global level, it serves as a bridge across cultures and a response to the social fragmentation brought by globalization. Therefore, a dialectical relationship emerges between the local and the global, where core Sufi values such as compassion, tolerance, and solidarity connect small communities like Nagari Paninggahan to broader transnational spiritual networks.²⁵

²³ Hijratur Rahmi, Edi Satria, and Taufik Akbar, "Pelatihan Batik Bagi Masyarakat Nagari Paninggahan Kabupaten Solok," *Jurnal Abdidas* 4, no. 5 (2023): 413–25, <https://doi.org/10.31004/abdidas.v4i5.841>.

²⁴ Amir Freimann et al., "What Makes Someone a Spiritual Exemplar to Another?," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 47, no. 3 (2025): 241–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00846724251329353>.

²⁵ Oleg Yarosh, "Globalization of Redemptive Sociality: Al-Ahbash and Haqqaniyya Transnational Sufi Networks in West Asia and Central-Eastern Europe," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2019): 22–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366518814915>.

Sufi ethics in the context of rural Minangkabau society is a manifestation of spirituality that integrates the values of divinity (*tawhid*), cosmic balance, and moral responsibility towards nature. In Sufism, nature is not merely a material object, but signs of God (*ayat kauniyya*) that possesses a divine spirit. Human relations with the environment are framed by the principle of *tawhidic* ecology—the awareness that all creatures are interconnected in existential unity with God.²⁶ This ethic fosters an attitude of asceticism, gratitude, and trust in the management of natural resources, encouraging people to live in harmony with natural cycles and to avoid excessive exploitation.

According to Nasr, the modern environmental crisis is rooted in the loss of a sacred view of nature.²⁷ In the paradigm of *tawhidic* ecology, nature does not exist separately from God; rather, it reflects His attributes. The practice of Sufi ethics in Paninggahan demonstrates a concrete form of *tawhidic* ecology, where preserving nature means preserving the sanctity of creation. This ecological relationship is spiritual, not instrumental. Thus, Sufi ethics in Paninggahan is not merely social morality, but a manifestation of metaphysical awareness of the sacred nature of the cosmos.

In the Paninggahan community, environmental harmony is reflected in daily behaviors such as protecting the forbidden forest, regulating planting patterns by season, and avoiding the waste of water and agricultural products. These activities are not only ecologically valuable but also spiritually valuable—because it is believed that destroying nature violates God's mandate as vicegerent on earth (*khalifa fil-arḍ*). Values such as respect for nature and simplicity are concrete forms of ethical morality in the ecological dimension.²⁸ This ethic emphasizes that Sufi spirituality is not merely an inner matter, but also a social practice that maintains balance between humans, nature, and God.

Thus, Sufi ethics serve as a philosophical and practical foundation for building ecological harmony in the Paninggahan community. Local Minangkabau wisdom, such as the principle of "alam takambang jadi guru" (nature becomes teacher), combines with Sufi values that teach inner awareness and balance in life. Together, these values foster a holistic ecological ethic: respecting nature as God's creation, maintaining ecosystem balance, and

²⁶ Naṣr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, 31–32.

²⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1997), 17.

²⁸ Mu'īl Yūsuf 'Izz Al-Dīn, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2000), 1–191.

upholding moral responsibility in resource use. This perspective strengthens the argument that living Sufism can serve as an ethical and spiritual foundation for a local wisdom-based model of environmental conservation.²⁹

Local Cosmology and Cultural Perspectives on Nature

The cosmology of the Minangkabau people is a value system formed through long historical, spiritual, and ecological experiences. The basic principle of "alam takambang jadi guru" (nature becomes a teacher) reflects the Minangkabau worldview, which views nature as a source of knowledge, ethics, and guidance for life.³⁰ In an ecological context, this philosophy gives rise to a cosmological view of humans as not rulers but part of the natural order whose balance must be maintained. This value aligns with Sufi ethics, which emphasize harmony between humans, nature, and the Creator.³¹

In the Paninggahan community, concrete forms of this perspective are manifested through customary regulations governing the community's relationship with the environment, such as the system of "rimbo melarang" (forbidden forests), the management of "lubuk melarang" (restricted fishing zones), and regulations on tree felling regulated by the Ninik Mamak (the highest traditional leader in Minangkabau) and customary institutions. These regulations serve as socio-ecological instruments to sustain natural resources, prevent overexploitation, and foster a sense of collective responsibility for the environment.³² Enforcing customary regulations is not only based on social sanctions but also has a spiritual dimension, as violating custom disrupts the balance of nature and God's creation.³³

Local Cosmology and Cultural Perspectives on Nature and Moving out of Salafism: Muslim Women and the Development of a Pious Feminist Consciousness can be understood through the way both frameworks reshape

²⁹ Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (London: Oneworld, 2020), 245.

³⁰ A. A. Navis, *Alam Takambang Jadi Guru: Adat Dan Kebudayaan Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Pustaka Grafitipers, 1984), 1–298.

³¹ Bawon Wiji Dia Prasasti and Purwati Angraini, "Nilai-Nilai Budaya Minangkabau Dalam Naskah Drama Dr. Anda Karya Wisran Hadi," *Fon: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 16, no. 2 (2025): 79–88, <https://doi.org/10.25134/n6rmm132>.

³² Sartini, "Menggali Kearifan Lokal Nusantara: Sebuah Kajian Filsafati," *Jurnal Filsafat* 14, no. 2 (2004): 111–12, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.33910>.

³³ Debojyoti Das, "Vernacular Tradition, Dalits and Connected Social History in the Littoral Bay of Bengal," *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 14, no. 2 (2022): 177–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X221106536>.

religious understanding in dialogue with lived experience.³⁴ Local cosmologies emphasize the integration of spiritual beliefs with ecological and cultural contexts, allowing religion to be interpreted in more flexible, place-based ways.³⁵ Similarly, Muslim women transitioning out of rigid Salafi interpretations often reconstruct their piety by engaging with broader cultural, social, and ethical perspectives, leading to a more reflective and empowering form of faith. In this sense, both processes illustrate a movement from strict, universalist doctrines toward more contextualized, interpretive, and lived expressions of belief that open space for agency, particularly in redefining the relationship between religion, identity, and the surrounding world.³⁶

The people of Nagari Paninggahan are very respectful of nature. Various traditional ceremonies are performed to maintain a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. For example, the "balimau" ceremony is held at Lake Singkarak before Ramadan. This ceremony involves physical and spiritual cleansing in the lake, symbolizing respect for water as the source of life. The culture of gotong royong or cooperation is one of the characteristics of the Minangkabau people, including in Nagari Paninggahan. Gotong royong is often practiced during forest and lake cleanups and in other conservation activities. For example, people gather to clean the lake of garbage or plant trees in the forest. Yosrizal, Wali Nagari Paninggahan, said that the local community holds a profound respect for nature as an inseparable part of human life. This perspective is reflected in various local traditions that emphasize the importance of maintaining environmental balance. One notable example is the balimau ritual conducted at Singkarak Lake before the month of Ramadan. This tradition is not only understood as a form of spiritual purification but also as a symbolic expression of respect for water as a vital source of life. Thus, local

³⁴ Iman Dawood, "Moving out of Salafism: Muslim Women and the Development of a Pious Feminist Consciousness," *Gender & Society* 39, no. 2 (2025): 257–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432251317157>.

³⁵ Mihai Varga and Aron Buzog "Conservatives and National-Conservatives," *Critical Sociology* 48, no. 6 (2022): 1089–1107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211057020>.

³⁶ Johannes Beller, "Social Inequalities in Loneliness: Disentangling the Contributions of Education, Income, and Occupation," *Sage Open* 14, no. 3 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241281408>.

cultural practices carry strong ecological significance in shaping community awareness toward environmental preservation.³⁷

The people of Nagari Paninggahan demonstrate active participation in environmental preservation through collective activities that have become an integral part of their social life. Community initiatives such as cleaning the Singkarak Lake area from waste and planting trees in nearby forest zones are carried out regularly. These activities not only function as environmental conservation efforts but also strengthen social cohesion among community members. This ecological awareness is deeply rooted in inherited cultural values, where protecting nature is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than merely a formal obligation.³⁸

From the perspective of Islamic scholars (alim ulama), environmental protection is considered part of religious teachings that highlight human responsibility as stewards (khalifah) on earth. Islamic values conveyed to the community stress that environmental destruction contradicts moral and spiritual principles. Therefore, religious sermons and counseling often include ecological messages, such as prohibitions against illegal logging and encouragement to maintain environmental cleanliness. This religious approach has proven effective in reinforcing environmental awareness, as it connects ecological responsibility with acts of worship.³⁹

Meanwhile, traditional leaders and local community members emphasize the crucial role of customary law in preserving nature. Various village regulations have been established to protect forests and the lake, including strict prohibitions against unauthorized tree cutting. In addition, collaboration with non-governmental organizations strengthens conservation efforts through educational programs and community empowerment initiatives. In this context, the community is not merely a passive recipient of policies but an active agent in ensuring environmental sustainability. The synergy between tradition, religion, and local governance forms a solid foundation for long-term ecological awareness in Nagari Paninggahan.⁴⁰

³⁷ Yosrizal, wali Nagari Paninggahan Sumatera Barat, wawancara oleh penulis, Peninggahan 10 Januari 2025.

³⁸ Rusydi, masyarakat Paninggahan, wawancara oleh penulis, 10 Januari 2025.

³⁹ Buya Syamsu, tokoh agama Nagari Paninggahan, wawancara oleh penulis, 10 Januari 2025.

⁴⁰ Zainul M, tokoh adat Nagari Paninggahan, Wawancara oleh penulis, 10 Januari 2025.

Minangkabau local wisdom creates a holistic, context-based conservation model. Values such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, and “malu jo adat” (shame and respect for custom) serve as the moral foundation for collective environmental management. Thus, customary regulations not only serve as social mechanisms but also contain ecological meanings that strengthen the harmony of the Paninggahan community with its natural surroundings.⁴¹

Balimau Tradition, Lubuk Larangan, and People’s Belief in Taboos

In the Paninggahan community, the practice of Sufism is manifested in local traditions that embody spiritual and ecological values. Two of the most prominent are the *Balimau* tradition and the management of the *Lubuk Larangan* (Forbidden Pool). These two practices demonstrate how Islamic spirituality, Sufi values, and local Minangkabau wisdom combine to maintain a balanced relationship between humans and nature. From a spiritual ecology perspective, these traditions are not merely cultural activities but manifestations of ecological awareness rooted in divine values and environmental sustainability.

The *Balimau* tradition, a communal river bath before Ramadan, symbolizes physical and spiritual purification. The Paninggahan community views water as a symbol of purity and divine grace, which must be kept clean. This ritual serves not only a spiritual function but also an ecological one, as it provides a collective momentum to clean the river and protect the aquatic ecosystem from pollution. From a Sufi perspective, maintaining water cleanliness is a manifestation of self-purification (*tazkiyyat al-nafs*), in which physical cleanliness reflects the purity of the heart.⁴² Thus, *Balimau* can be understood as a spiritual ecological practice that affirms the unity between humans, nature, and God.

Meanwhile, *Lubuk Larangan* is a form of local wisdom that regulates certain fishing zones to prevent indiscriminate exploitation. These pools are guarded by customary agreements and community moral laws, and may be opened only at specific times through communal rituals. In the Paninggahan community's view, guarding *Lubuk Larangan* is not only a form of resource

⁴¹ Zulkarnaini, "Kearifan lokal masyarakat Minangkabau dalam pelestarian lingkungan," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Mamangan* 5, no. 1 (2016): 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.22202/mamangan.2016.v5i1.1637>

⁴² Muhammad Syihabuddin, Zulf Mubaraq, and M. Lutfi Mustofa, “Elucidating Eco-Religious In Islamic Studies And The Future Of Environmental Ethics,” *Al’Adalah* 26, no. 2 (2023): 189–207, <https://doi.org/10.35719/aladalah.v26i2.370>.

management but also a manifestation of God's mandate as the vicegerent. Sufi values such as non-greediness, trustworthiness, and brotherhood are the foundation for managing these areas. This concept demonstrates that Sufi ethics have been internalized within the social and ecological systems of the Minangkabau people, forming what is known as spiritual ecology—the integration of spiritual, social, and environmental values.

Thus, *Balimau* and *Lubuk Larangan* serve not only as traditional or conservation practices, but also as expressions of living Sufism within the collective consciousness of the Paninggahan community. Both affirm that Islamic spirituality, when experienced through local customs and culture, can be a moral and ecological force for building harmony with nature.

Nasr emphasized that water, soil, and all natural elements have a sacred dimension because they reflect God's manifestation. The *Balimau* tradition reflects reverence for water as a symbol of divine purity. Meanwhile, the *Lubuk Larangan* illustrates the application of the values of trust (*amāna*) and balance (*tawāzun*) in managing natural resources. Within the framework of *tawhidic* ecology, these practices demonstrate the success of local communities in integrating Islamic spirituality with ecological practices, transcending the dichotomy between religion and the environment often encountered in modernity.

There are several taboos applied in the community to preserve nature. For example, it is not allowed to cut trees carelessly in the forest, and there are strict rules regarding fishing in Lake Singkarak. These rules are implemented to prevent the overexploitation of natural resources. The people of Nagari Paninggahan have long applied the principles of sustainable natural resource management. They understand the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance for their survival. For example, the *Lubuk Larangan* system is implemented to protect the fish population in Singkarak Lake. *Lubuk Larangan* is a water area where fishing is prohibited at certain times to allow the fish to breed. Environmentally friendly farming techniques are also part of the community's local wisdom. They use the “shifting cultivation” technique, which allows the soil to recover its fertility. In addition, organic fertilizers are preferred over chemical fertilizers to reduce environmental impacts. This is as expressed by Rahmat, one of the farmers who manages forest sustainability:

"Our forest farmer group applies environmentally friendly farming techniques. We use a shifting cultivation system that allows the soil to recover its fertility. In addition, we prefer organic fertilizers over

chemical fertilizers to reduce environmental impact. We hold regular *Gotong Royong* (community cooperation) to clear the forest and plant trees. Gotong royong is a very strong part of our culture. All community members, from the young to the old, participate in these activities. We also work closely with village governments and non-governmental organizations for technical and financial assistance.”⁴³

The Need for Environmental Education and Government Policies for Conservation

The government of Nagari Paninggahan has issued various policies to protect the environment. One example is the village regulation that prohibits the cutting down of trees without a permit. The village government is also active in developing conservation programs and collaborating with various parties to preserve forests and lakes. Non-governmental organizations are often involved in various conservation programs in Nagari Paninggahan. They provide technical and financial assistance for environmental projects, such as forest rehabilitation and sustainable fisheries resource management. This cooperation is very important in supporting the local community's efforts in preserving nature.⁴⁴

Likewise, environmental education is crucial for the people of Nagari Paninggahan. Various outreach programs organized by the village government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aim to raise public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.⁴⁵ Schools also integrate environmental education into their curriculum to instill conservation values in children from an early age. Erni, an environmental activist and elementary school teacher, said:

"At school, we integrate environmental education into the curriculum. Children are taught about the importance of protecting forests and lakes from an early age. We also organize outdoor activities such as tree planting and environmental clean-ups. In addition, I am active in village extension activities to educate the community on ways to protect the

⁴³ Rahmat, petani Nagari Paninggahan, wawancara oleh penulis, 10 Januari 2025.

⁴⁴ Yosrizal, wali Nagari Paninggahan, wawancara oleh penulis, 10 Januari 2025.

⁴⁵ Dini Annisha, "Integrasi Penggunaan Kearifan Lokal (Local Wisdom) Dalam Proses Pembelajaran Pada Konsep Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar," *Jurnal Basicedu* 8, no. 3 (2024): 2108–15, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v8i3.7706>; Margaretha Lidya Sumarni et al., "Integrasi Nilai Budaya Lokal Pada Pembelajaran Di Sekolah Dasar," *Journal of Education Research* 5, no. 3 (2024): 2993–98, <https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v5i3.1330>.

environment. The children have become more aware and concerned about the environment. They often remind their parents not to litter or cut down trees. This awareness is also starting to grow among adults, although there are still challenges."⁴⁶

Unfortunately, economic pressure on locals can lead to the exploitation of natural resources. Some residents may be tempted to cut down trees illegally or to fish destructively to earn more money. To address this challenge, it is important to develop community-based solutions that can provide economic benefits while preserving nature. For example, ecotourism development can be an environmentally friendly alternative source of income. Communities can be involved in managing homestays, guiding, and other ecotourism activities that respect the natural beauty of forests and lakes. In Sufism, there is a deep understanding that the universe is a manifestation of God; everything in nature is a divine sign (*ayat*) that must be respected and preserved. Sufism teaches living in harmony with nature by cultivating spiritual awareness of the interconnectedness of all created beings.⁴⁷

Economic pressures that drive the exploitation of nature, such as illegal logging and destructive fishing, reflect an inner imbalance and loss of spiritual awareness. From a Sufistic perspective, this kind of action is a form of negligence (*gafila*), which is forgetting the spiritual origins of humans and their responsibilities as caliphs on earth.⁴⁸ Conversely, community-based solutions such as ecotourism that involve communities in protecting forests and lakes exemplify the concept of *ihsan*, doing good with the awareness that God is always watching. The value of gotong royong and local wisdom that grows in Nagari Paninggahan reflects the spirit of tolerance (*tasamuh*), brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), and simplicity (*zuhud*), all core principles of Sufism.

The Paninggahan community practices Sufism in their daily lives through simple attitudes, gratitude, and a commitment to harmony with nature. This is evident in their respect for water through the *Balimau* tradition at Lake Singkarak, which is not only a spiritual ritual ahead of Ramadan, but also a symbol of appreciation for water as a source of life. The simplicity of life, mutual cooperation in protecting the forest, and the prohibition on cutting

⁴⁶ Erni, aktivis lingkungan dan Guru SD Nagari Paninggahan, wawancara oleh penulis, 11 Januari 2025.

⁴⁷ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 59–60.

⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)* (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Azhariya, 1898), 4.

down trees without permission demonstrate the Sufi value of awareness that nature is God's trust to be protected.⁴⁹

The local wisdom of the Paninggahan community is also reflected in the *Lubuk Larangan* system in Lake Singkarak, which prohibits fishing in certain areas to preserve the breeding cycle of Bilih fish. This philosophy holds that humans must exercise restraint so that nature remains sustainable for future generations. Similarly, environmentally friendly agricultural practices, such as land rotation (shifting cultivation) and the use of organic fertilizers, demonstrate an ecological awareness rooted in the principle of natural balance. This local wisdom aligns with the view that customs and nature form an inseparable unity.⁵⁰

The integration of Sufi values and local wisdom is evident in the conservation practices of the Paninggahan community. Sufi values of simplicity encourage the community not to overexploit nature, while gratitude to Allah is expressed through efforts to maintain soil fertility with organic fertilizers. A sense of responsibility as caliphs is reflected in the management of protected forests and the protection of water sources. For example, collective tree planting in the forest is a tangible way to integrate spirituality and customs into the preservation of the ecosystem. Thus, Sufism serves as the ethical foundation, while local wisdom serves as the practical guide for preserving the environment.

Conclusion

This study portrays living Sufism on how spiritual ecology functions as a lived ethical system within Minangkabau cosmology. Through the case of Paninggahan Village, this study reveals that environmental conservation is not merely a moral or theological abstraction but a form of lived spirituality embedded in *adat* (customary law), daily rituals, and Sufi teachings of tawhid (unity of existence). This study developed a conservation model grounded in local spirituality, in which Sufi values such as asceticism, gratitude, trustworthiness, and balance serve as the basis for managing forests, lakes, and Bilih ecosystems in Nagari Paninggahan. This model demonstrates that conservation can be developed not only through technical or regulatory

⁴⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam Dan Nestapa Manusia Modern*, trans. Anas Mahyuddin (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), 42.

⁵⁰ Suratni Afrianti, "Rimbo Larangan Kearifan Lokal Masyarakat Minang Kabau Untuk Menjaga Kelestarian Sumber Daya Alam Dan Lingkungan," *Agroprimatech* 3, no. 2 (2020): 74–78, <https://doi.org/10.34012/agroprimatech.v3i2.917>.

approaches, but also through the internalization of spiritual values and local wisdom, thereby supporting holistic, sustainable development that integrates the spiritual, social, and material well-being of the community.

This study expands the study of Sufism by placing it as a socio-ecological ethic relevant to contemporary issues, particularly the environmental crisis. The practice of living Sufism in Nagari Paninggahan demonstrates the connection between Islamic spirituality and ecological awareness. This contributes to the development of Sufism studies as a source of ethical values, enriching Islamic ecotheology with a practical foundation through an empirical understanding of the integration of spirituality, local culture, and ecology.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single rural community in West Sumatra, which may not fully represent the diversity of Sufi-environmental practices across the Indonesian archipelago. The ethnographic scope, while deep and contextually rich, limits the generalizability of findings beyond the Paninggahan case. Additionally, the study primarily relies on local oral traditions, ritual observations, and interpretive interviews, which—though invaluable—may not capture the full historical transformations of Sufi-environmental relations under modern economic pressures. Future research should therefore undertake multi-sited or longitudinal studies that examine how different Sufi orders engage with environmental change, modernization, and Islamic reform discourses in other regions. Comparative analyses between Minangkabau and other Muslim societies, or between rural and urban Sufi communities, could further refine our understanding of spiritual ecology as a dynamic ethical system that adapts to changing socio-environmental contexts.

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