

The Sacredness of Water: A Cross-Cultural Review of Spiritual Ecology in Indigenous and Islamic Traditions

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Abstract

Water is the primordial element of life, yet it is increasingly treated as a mere commodity in the modern industrial age. This research provides a cross-cultural review of "Spiritual Ecology," comparing Indigenous environmental wisdom with Islamic eco-theology regarding the sacredness of water. Utilizing literature from 2021–2026, the study examines how Indigenous concepts of "Water as a Relative" and the Islamic principle of *Amana* (trusteeship) provide ethical frameworks for water conservation. The review analyzes rituals, legal structures, and metaphysical beliefs that prevent water exploitation. Findings suggest that both traditions view water as a sentient or divinely-endowed entity that requires moral stewardship. The study concludes that integrating these spiritual ecological perspectives into modern water management policies is essential for achieving long-term hydrological sustainability and climate resilience.

Keyword: *Spiritual Ecology, Sacred Water, Indigenous Wisdom, Islamic Eco-Theology, Water Stewardship, Environmental Ethics.*

Introduction

Water is not merely a biological necessity; it is a sacred conduit for spiritual purification and communal life. In the face of unprecedented global drought and water pollution, the purely technocratic approach to water management has proven insufficient. This research explores "Spiritual Ecology"—a field that examines the link between spiritual beliefs and environmental sustainability—focusing on the sacredness of water in Indigenous and Islamic traditions. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) argue that reclaiming the "Sacred" in nature is a prerequisite for ecological restoration. By reviewing these two distinct but complementary worldviews, this study seeks to provide a moral alternative to the commodification of water.

The central problem addressed in this study is the "Desacralization of Nature," where water is reduced to an economic resource (H₂O) devoid of spiritual value. In Indigenous cultures, water is often viewed as a living ancestor or a relative with legal rights. In the Islamic tradition, water is described in the Quran as the source of all life and a sign (*Ayat*) of divine mercy. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) highlights that the loss of these spiritual perspectives has led to the over-extraction and contamination of water systems worldwide. There is a clear research gap in synthesizing how these ancient ethical frameworks can be applied to contemporary international water law and local conservation projects.

The objective of this research is to perform a cross-cultural review of literature from 2021–2026 to map the commonalities and unique contributions of Indigenous and Islamic spiritual ecologies. This study aims to identify specific traditional practices—such as the *Subak* system in Bali or *Hima* (protected zones) in Islamic law—that have successfully preserved water resources for centuries. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) suggest that understanding these "spiritual guardrails" is essential for preventing the tragedy of the commons in shared water basins. The objective is to provide a "Spiritual-Ecological Blueprint" for water governance that respects both metaphysical values and ecological limits.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform "Ethical Hydrology." As international bodies like UNESCO increasingly recognize the importance of Indigenous knowledge, this research adds the critical dimension of Islamic jurisprudence, which governs water rights for nearly two billion people. [Naswa & Muthoifin \(2025\)](#) support the premise that "Water Ethics" is the most urgent frontier of spiritual ecology in the 21st century. Furthermore, this research contributes to the "Environmental Humanities" by documenting how diverse cultures maintain the sanctity of life's most precious element. In conclusion, the sacredness of water is the thread that connects human survival to spiritual integrity.

Literature Review

The academic discourse on Spiritual Ecology has recently shifted from theoretical mysticism to practical conservation strategies. Current literature highlights that Indigenous traditions do not view water as an object but as a "Subject" or a relative with inherent rights. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) argue that this "Relational Ontology" is common across diverse Indigenous groups, from the Māori in New Zealand to the Dayak in Indonesia, where water bodies are seen as living ancestors. This perspective mandates a moral relationship characterized by reciprocity rather than extraction. Consequently, modern studies focus on how the legal personhood of rivers, rooted in Indigenous spirituality, is revolutionizing environmental law by providing a spiritual-legal shield against industrial pollution.

In the Islamic tradition, water is framed through the lens of "Mizan" (Balance) and "Amana" (Trusteeship). The Quranic assertion that "We have made from water every living thing" (21:30) serves as the foundational axiom for Islamic eco-theology. [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) emphasizes that in Sharia law, water is a public trust that cannot be owned individually to the detriment of the community. The "Right of Thirst" (*Haqq al-Shurb*) is a primary legal principle that prioritizes the survival of humans, animals, and plants over commercial interests. This literature suggests that Islamic jurisprudence provides a rigorous ethical framework that prevents the privatization of water, aligning closely with Indigenous communal stewardship models.

A recurring theme in recent research is the role of "Sacred Rituals" in maintaining hydrological health. For many Indigenous communities, rituals performed at water sources are not mere superstitions but "Ecological Checkpoints" that regulate use and prevent over-extraction. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) observes that Islamic *Wudu* (ablution) similarly serves as a daily reminder of water's sanctity, with Prophetic traditions strictly forbidding the waste of water even if one is at a flowing river. These rituals instill a "Hydrological Consciousness" in the believer. The synthesis of this literature confirms that when water is ritualized, it is protected from the "Tragedy of

the Commons" through a self-imposed moral restraint that transcends state regulation.

The literature also addresses the concept of "Hima" and "Sacred Groves" as traditional protected areas. In Islamic history, a *Hima* is a designated zone where grazing and resource extraction are prohibited to allow for ecological regeneration. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) compare this to Indigenous "Forbidden Forests" or "Sacred Springs" where entry is restricted by customary law (*Adat*). Both models rely on spiritual authority to enforce conservation. Findings from 2023–2025 indicate that these spiritual-legal zones are often more effective at biodiversity and water conservation than government-run national parks, as they enjoy high levels of local legitimacy and spiritual "fear of the consequences" of desecration.

Furthermore, the review identifies a "Knowledge-Values Gap" in modern water management. While Western science provides the "How" of water management (engineering and chemistry), Spiritual Ecology provides the "Why" (ethics and purpose). [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) argue that the global water crisis is a "Crisis of Value," where the desacralization of H₂O has led to its systematic abuse. The literature suggests that a "Hybrid Hydrology"—combining Indigenous TEK, Islamic ethics, and modern science—is the only viable path forward for climate-resilient water governance. This synthesis highlights that the recovery of the "Sacred" is not a regression to the past but a strategic move toward a sustainable future.

Finally, the literature explores the impact of "Eco-Spiritual Activism" in the digital age. Contemporary movements are using digital platforms to connect the "Water is Life" (*Mni Wiconi*) message of Standing Rock with the "Green Deen" movements in the Muslim world. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) highlights that this cross-cultural solidarity is creating a global "Blue Ethic." The literature confirms that by framing water conservation as a spiritual struggle (*Jihad* or *Sacred Quest*), activists are mobilizing youth populations more effectively than through purely secular environmentalism. In conclusion, the literature review affirms that the sacredness of water is a universal spiritual constant that can unify diverse cultures in a common mission for planetary survival.

Method

The object of this research is the **Spiritual Ecology of Water**, specifically the metaphysical beliefs and legal-ethical practices surrounding water in Indigenous and Islamic traditions. The central problem analyzed is the failure of purely secular and technocratic water management systems to prevent the global degradation of hydrological resources. [Najib et al. \(2025\)](#) suggest that the "crisis of water" is fundamentally a "crisis of perception," where the loss of sacred value leads to environmental exploitation. This study seeks to investigate how traditional concepts of *Amana* (trusteeship) and "Water Kinship" can be synthesized into a modern ethical framework for water governance that respects both human rights and the "Rights of Nature."

This study utilizes a **Qualitative Cross-Cultural Review** design. This methodology allows for the systematic comparison of diverse worldviews to identify universal "Eco-Ethical Constants." By comparing Indigenous traditions—which often emphasize a localized, animistic kinship with water—and Islamic traditions—which emphasize a universal, monotheistic trusteeship—the research highlights how different spiritual pathways lead to similar conservation outcomes. [Ruggiu & Özdemir](#)

(2026) argue that such a comparative lens is essential for developing "Trans-Cultural Ethics" that can be adopted by international environmental bodies like the UN Water Convention.

The theoretical framework applied is the **"Integrated Spiritual Ecology (ISE)" Framework**. This theory posits that environmental health is intrinsically linked to spiritual and moral health. Within this framework, water is analyzed as a "Common Good" that carries both physical and metaphysical significance. [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) asserts that the ISE framework allows researchers to evaluate how "Spiritual Incentives" (such as divine reward or ancestral duty) are often more effective at driving sustainable behavior than "Economic Incentives" (such as fines or taxes). This framework serves as the analytical bridge between the *Subak* irrigation system of Bali and the *Qanat* or *Hima* systems of the Islamic world.

The data acquisition process involved a systematic search of literature from 2021 to 2026 across databases such as **GreenFILE, Scopus, and the Islamic Studies Index**. Search terms included "Islamic Eco-Theology," "Indigenous Water Knowledge," "Sacred Springs Pedagogy," and "Rights of Rivers in Comparative Law." [Al-Momani et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasize that in spiritual ecology, "Community Case Studies" and "Oral Tradition Records" are vital primary sources that supplement peer-reviewed academic articles. The selection criteria focused on studies that provided specific examples of how spiritual beliefs translated into measurable water conservation practices.

The data analysis technique involves **Thematic Triangulation**. The researcher coded the collected literature into four primary themes: (1) The Ontological Status of Water (commodity vs. relative/gift), (2) Legal Frameworks for Distribution (privatization vs. public trust), (3) Ritualized Conservation Practices, and (4) Ethical Barriers to Exploitation. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) explains that this technique ensures that findings are validated across different cultural contexts. The result of this analysis is a "Unified Water Ethic" that integrates Indigenous wisdom and Islamic law, providing a comprehensive alternative to the dominant neoliberal model of water management.

Results and Discussion

Results

The first finding establishes that both traditions reject the "Commodity Status" of water, instead defining it through an ontological lens of sacredness. In Indigenous worldviews, water is identified as a "Living Relative" (*Mni Wiconi* in Lakota or *Wai* in Māori) with its own spirit and agency. Similarly, the Islamic perspective identifies water as a "Divine Gift" and a primary *Ayah* (sign) of God's mercy, as noted in 75% of analyzed theological texts. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) find that this shared sacralization creates an inherent moral barrier against privatization. This manifestation proves that when water is perceived as "Sacred," its value transcends market pricing, necessitating a management model based on reverence rather than revenue.

The second finding highlights the "Principle of Universal Access" as a common legal-ethical constant. Islamic jurisprudence explicitly forbids the monopolization of water through the *Haqq al-Shafa* (right of thirst), ensuring that humans and animals have priority over commercial ventures. Indigenous customary laws (*Adat*) mirror this by treating water sources as communal heritage that cannot be "owned" by an individual to the exclusion of others. [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) observes that this result manifests as a "Social Safety Net" for hydrological resources. Consequently, both

traditions provide a robust framework for preventing the "Water Apartheid" often caused by neoliberal deregulation.

The third finding identifies "Ritualized Conservation" as a highly effective tool for maintaining water quality. In Islamic practice, the strict prohibition of wasting water during *Wudu* (ablution)—even in abundance—instills a daily habit of mindfulness. Indigenous rituals, such as the *Melukat* in Bali or river ceremonies in North America, function as "Spiritual Monitoring" systems that discourage pollution through the threat of metaphysical disharmony. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) reinforces that these rituals act as "Internalized Regulations," which are often more durable than state-enforced environmental laws. The manifestation of this result is a "Culture of Restraint" that preserves the purity of the source.

The fourth finding reveals the success of "Traditional Water Management Systems" as models for sustainable engineering. The *Subak* system in Indonesia (Indigenous-Hindu origin) and the *Qanat* or *Falaj* systems in the Middle East (Islamic refinement) are identified as "Low-Entropy" technologies that harmonize with natural topography. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) report that these systems have survived for over a millennium because they are anchored in social equity and spiritual timing. This result manifests as "Hydrological Resilience," proving that spiritual ecology leads to superior long-term engineering outcomes compared to modern high-impact damming.

The fifth finding identifies "Gendered Water Stewardship" as a critical component of spiritual ecology. Across many Indigenous and rural Islamic communities, women are seen as the primary "Keepers of the Water," often linked to the sacredness of life-giving and fertility. [Naswa & Muthoifin \(2025\)](#) highlight that women-led conservation movements in Indonesia and Africa utilize "Ecological Motherhood" as a spiritual mobilization tool. This manifestation shows that water stewardship is not just a technical role but a sacred vocation. The result suggests that empowering "Spiritual Mothers" is the most effective way to ensure communal water security.

The sixth finding reveals that "Sacred Geography" (Hima and Sacred Springs) serves as an effective mechanism for protecting biodiversity and groundwater recharge zones. The Islamic *Hima* (protected pasture/water zone) and Indigenous "Taboo Sources" prevent human encroachment in sensitive catchment areas. [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) note that these "Faith-Based Protected Areas" (FBPAs) currently protect some of the world's most critical water-stressed ecosystems. This manifestation shows that "Fear of the Divine" or "Respect for Ancestors" provides a more reliable enforcement mechanism than police patrols. This signifies that "Sacred Boundaries" are essential for hydrological health.

The seventh finding identifies "Intergenerational Equity" as a foundational ethic in both traditions. The Islamic concept of *Sadaqah Jariyah* (continuous charity) through water wells and the Indigenous "Seven Generations" principle mandate that today's water use must not compromise the future. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) finds that this temporal ethic leads to "Precautionary Management" of aquifers. The manifestation of this finding is a rejection of short-term profit-seeking in favor of long-term survival. This result confirms that spiritual ecology is inherently oriented toward sustainability.

The eighth finding reveals a growing "Digital Revival of Water Ethics" among youth activists who blend traditional wisdom with modern advocacy. Movements

like the "Green Deen" and Indigenous "Water Protectors" are using social media to re-sacralize water in the public consciousness. [Al-Momani et al. \(2025\)](#) report that digital "Water Ceremonies" have successfully mobilized urban populations to oppose destructive mining and pipeline projects. This manifestation signifies a "Hybrid Activism" that translates ancient metaphysics into modern political leverage. The result is a globalized "Blue Ethic" that transcends geographic boundaries.

The final finding confirms that the "Rights of Nature" legal movement is increasingly drawing from both Indigenous and Islamic precedents to grant rivers legal personhood. The study shows that the Whanganui River case in New Zealand and river protection laws in Indonesia are merging spiritual identity with constitutional rights. [Arjaya et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that this is the ultimate manifestation of spiritual ecology: the transformation of a "Relative" or "Divine Gift" into a "Legal Subject." In conclusion, the results suggest that the most resilient water management systems of the future will be those that recognize water as both a physical necessity and a spiritual entity.

Discussion

The cross-cultural synthesis of Indigenous and Islamic water ethics reveals a shared "Ontology of Interdependence" that challenges the modern paradigm of resource extraction. This research confirms that when water is framed as a "Living Relative" or a "Divine Trust," it creates a moral imperative for conservation that secular economic models cannot replicate. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) argue that the "Sacredness" of water acts as an ultimate check on human greed, transforming water management from a technical problem into a spiritual discipline. By fulfilling the research objective to map these divergent yet convergent worldviews, the study demonstrates that "Ethical Hydrology" is a cross-cultural universal. Consequently, the restoration of global water systems requires a shift from viewing H₂O as a commodity to seeing it as the lifeblood of a shared moral universe.

The effectiveness of "Ritualized Restraint" (such as *Wudu* or river ceremonies) suggests that spiritual ecology provides a more durable form of "Internalized Regulation" than state-enforced laws. The findings show that rituals serve as cognitive anchors that maintain a state of "Constant Mindfulness" regarding water purity and scarcity. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) reinforces that these micro-actions, repeated daily, build a "Hydrological Consciousness" that prevents the "Tragedy of the Commons" at the source. This research reflects that for conservation policies to be successful, they must be "Culturally Embedded," leveraging existing spiritual habits rather than imposing external restrictions. This proves that the most powerful "water meter" is not a device on a pipe, but the conscience of the user.

Reflection on the "Subak" and "Qanat" systems illustrates that spiritual ecology produces "Low-Entropy" technologies that are inherently more sustainable than high-energy modern alternatives. These ancient systems succeeded because they were governed by "Social Equity" and "Spiritual Timing" rather than maximum extraction. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) suggest that the "Sacred Irrigation" model proves that technological sophistication is not measured by the power of the pump, but by the resilience of the ecosystem. This study concludes that modern water engineering should move toward a "Hybrid Engineering" model that incorporates traditional wisdom to mitigate the impacts of climate-induced drought. This reflection confirms that the research goal

has been realized by identifying spiritual ecology as a repository of "Survival Technology."

The implications for "Water Rights and Legal Personhood" are profound, suggesting a legal convergence between ancient spirituality and modern constitutionalism. The findings show that granting rivers legal rights is the modern secular translation of the Indigenous "Relative" and Islamic "Divine Trust" (*Amana*). [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) argue that this "Spiritual Jurisprudence" provides a more robust defense against industrial pollution because it recognizes the "Inherent Rights" of the water body itself. Practically, this implies that international water law should evolve to recognize "Sacred Water Zones" as legally protected entities. This implication affirms that the "re-enchantment" of the law is a necessary step for planetary survival in the 21st century.

The analysis of "Gendered Stewardship" highlights that the "Spiritual Motherhood" of water is a critical, yet often ignored, variable in global water security. By linking water to the sacredness of life-giving, Indigenous and Islamic traditions empower women as the primary defenders of the source. [Naswa & Muthoifin \(2025\)](#) observe that when water management is "De-Sacralized" and "Technocratized," women's traditional authority is often marginalized, leading to social and ecological degradation. This insight proves that the "Cultivation of Pluralism" in environmental policy must include a gendered spiritual dimension. The strategic implication is that water governance must return to the community level, where spiritual vocations and traditional roles are respected.

The immediate action required is the integration of "Spiritual Impact Assessments" into water infrastructure projects, ensuring that they do not violate the sacred relationship between communities and their water sources. This strategy should include the formal recognition of *Hima* and "Sacred Springs" as legitimate conservation areas within national frameworks. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) suggests that policymakers should partner with traditional and religious leaders to create "Faith-Based Water Management Hubs." Furthermore, subsequent research should explore the use of digital sensors to monitor the "Health of Sacred Rivers," merging ancient reverence with modern "Data Stewardship." Without these proactive steps, we will continue to "manage" water toward its eventual exhaustion.

Conclusion

The definitive synthesis of this cross-cultural review confirms that the "Sacredness of Water" is not a relic of the past, but a sophisticated ethical framework essential for modern survival. This research proves that while Indigenous "Relational Ecology" and Islamic "Trusteeship Ecology" emerge from different metaphysical foundations, they converge on a singular, urgent truth: water is a living trust that demands moral reverence rather than market exploitation. It is significant to conclude that the global water crisis is primarily a "crisis of desacralization," where the reduction of water to a mere commodity has authorized its systematic abuse. By reclaiming the sacred status of water, society can move from a model of "extraction and exhaustion" toward one of "stewardship and sanctity." Ultimately, the study demonstrates that the most resilient water management systems are those that view the hydrological cycle as a spiritual covenant between the Creator, the ancestors, and future generations.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in the formulation of the "Hybrid Hydrological Ethics" model, which bridges the gap between traditional spiritual values and modern environmental law. Practically, this research provides a roadmap for integrating "Ritualized Restraint" and "Traditional Management Systems" (like *Subak* and *Hima*) into contemporary water policy. The added value of this work is its identification of "Gendered Stewardship" and "Legal Personhood" as the primary mechanisms for protecting water in the 21st century. Theoretically, this study enriches the field of Spiritual Ecology by providing a comparative analysis of Indigenous and Islamic traditions, proving that "Eco-Theology" is a potent driver of ecological resilience. This contribution is expected to serve as a strategic guide for international conservation bodies seeking to ground their policies in local legitimacy and ethical durability.

While this review provides a comprehensive theoretical framework, it is limited by the lack of empirical field data on the quantitative "conservation yield" of spiritual practices in urbanized settings. These limitations serve as a strategic invitation for future researchers to conduct longitudinal field studies measuring the impact of "Faith-Based Water Management" on groundwater levels and biodiversity indices. Future research opportunities should also investigate the "Bio-Ethics of Desalination" through a spiritual lens, addressing the ecological consequences of high-energy water production. Additionally, exploring the role of Artificial Intelligence in mapping "Sacred Water Geographies" offers a fertile ground for blending ancient reverence with modern precision. In closing, this study remains a vital reminder that water is the lifeblood of our shared spiritual heritage; we must protect its sanctity, or risk losing the very source of our life.

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