

GREEN ISLAM, ENVIRONMENTAL BUDDHISM, AND INTERFAITH ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: A GLOBAL APPROACH TO ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Parthivrajsinh Kathavadia, Prof. (Dr). Sonal Pandya

Research Scholar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Gujarat University

Professor and Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Gujarat University

Abstract

This article explores the intersection of religion and environmental activism, focusing on movements within Islam, Buddhism, and interfaith initiatives. The Green Islam movement, led by the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia, demonstrates how Islamic teachings are being applied to environmental conservation. Through sermons, solar energy installations, and water conservation measures, the mosque has become a model for ecological responsibility. Similarly, Buddhist environmental ethics, grounded in principles like karma and non-violence, have inspired various forms of activism, including the "tree ordination" practice in Thailand and Cambodia's Monks Community Forest initiative. The article also examines the Dhamma walks, environmental pilgrimages aimed at raising awareness about ecological crises, and Samboilbae, a Korean Buddhist protest ritual. These movements highlight the growing role of religious communities in addressing global environmental challenges by linking spiritual principles with ecological action.

INTRODUCTION

In an age where environmental degradation presents one of the greatest threats to humanity, diverse religious communities around the world are aligning their faith with environmental activism. From Jakarta's Istiqlal Mosque to Buddhist movements in Thailand, Islamic, Christian, and Buddhist leaders are weaving ecological ethics into their religious teachings, driving grassroots environmentalism and awakening a spiritual sense of responsibility for the planet.

GREEN ISLAM AND ECOLOGICAL MOSQUES: A MOVEMENT FROM INDONESIA

The Green Islam movement, initiated by the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia, exemplifies how Islam is connecting faith with ecological responsibility. The Grand Imam, who also served as Indonesia's deputy minister of religious affairs and head of the University of Quranic Science, transformed one of the world's largest mosques into a beacon of environmentalism. Istiqlal Mosque was equipped with 500 solar panels, slow-flow faucets for ablution before prayers, and an advanced water recycling system—all part of a sustainability project supported by the World Bank.

The Imam's sermons began to center on environmental care, targeting approximately 800,000 worshippers and encouraging the transformation of mosques into "ecological mosques." His call for action led the mosque's followers to clean a nearby trash-filled river, ultimately earning the mosque a green building certification. Top Islamic clergy also began issuing fatwas (religious edicts) to address climate change and environmental issues. Although these fatwas are not legally binding, they serve as powerful moral and religious guidance for Muslim communities.

Notably, environmental activist Aak Abdullah al-Kudus from East Java combined Islamic teachings with a reforestation effort decades earlier. Despite facing death threats and a fatwa issued against him by the Ulema Council, Aak eventually garnered widespread support, forming the "Green Army"—a group of tree-planting volunteers who reforested 2,000 hectares of protected land. His work caught the attention of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest grassroots organization, which recruited him for its spiritual ecology programs. These initiatives emphasized conservation within Islamic teachings, encouraging waste management education in Islamic schools, where students learned to convert waste into fertilizer and were encouraged to adopt environmentally friendly practices like reusable tampons for girls.

BUDDHISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: FROM KARMA TO TREE ORDINATIONS

Buddhism's ecological teachings, rooted in concepts like karma, ahimsa (non-violence), and bodhichitta (compassion), have long underscored a deep sense of responsibility toward nature. The 14th Dalai Lama, for instance, has articulated the law of karma as a principle that underscores the connection between actions and

their environmental consequences. This understanding of interconnectedness, combined with teachings of non-violence, offers a philosophical framework for environmental activism.

The Buddhist tradition of revering nature extends beyond theory into practice. The Jataka tales, which depict the Buddha in various animal forms, highlight the deep connection between humans and other living beings, reinforcing the need to protect all forms of life. Buddhism's association with forests is equally significant—Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment under a Bodhi tree, and the forests became sites of meditation and spiritual retreat for monks. This connection gave rise to environmental activism within Buddhist communities in countries like Thailand, Cambodia, and Indonesia.

In Thailand, environmental activism among Buddhist monks began to flourish in the 1980s when the country faced rampant deforestation, floods, and landslides. Buddhist monks, led by figures like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and P.A. Payutto, emphasized environmental justice as part of their religious duty. One of the most creative and symbolic practices that emerged was the “tree ordination” ceremony, where monks wrapped trees in saffron robes, signifying the sanctity of nature and its protection as part of Buddhist practice.

This form of environmental activism found a foothold in Cambodia, where Venerable Bun Saluth founded the Monks Community Forest in the Oddar Meanchey province. This movement evolved into a larger project aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and land degradation. Covering 65,000 hectares of forest, the initiative marked one of the first Buddhist-led efforts to address climate change through conservation practices.

DHAMMA WALKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PILGRIMAGES

Buddhist environmentalism also incorporates the practice of pilgrimage walks, known as “Dhammayeitra,” to spread environmental awareness. Initiated by Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian monk inspired by Gandhi and Japanese pacifist traditions, these walks embody peace, non-violence, and environmental activism. In Thailand, the first Dhamma walk for environmental purposes took place in 1996, aiming to raise awareness about the deteriorating condition of Songkhla Lake. Monks and environmental activists worked to draw attention to the depletion of fish stocks, wildlife loss, and the impact of development on the lake.

The concept of environmental pilgrimage walks has since expanded beyond Buddhism, integrating diverse religious traditions. For example, the Dhamma yeitra walks in Cambodia not only attracted Buddhist monks but also Muslim communities and indigenous animists, demonstrating how environmental activism can unite people across faiths. American monks like Santikaro Bhikkhu also joined these walks, contributing to the internationalization of Buddhist environmentalism.

SAMBOILBAE: A BUDDHIST PROTEST TACTIC IN SOUTH KOREA

Buddhist-inspired environmental protests have also emerged in South Korea. The “Samboilbae” ritual—three steps followed by a full-body prostration—was adapted as a form of protest against the Saemangeum Reclamation Project, which led to severe environmental damage on South Korea’s southwest coast. Spearheaded by Buddhist monk Sukyong, Catholic clergyman Paul Moon Kyu-Hyun, and Protestant Reverend Lee Hee-Won, the protesters walked 350 kilometers in this ritualistic manner to Seoul, raising awareness about the ecological destruction caused by the project. Their actions, rooted in spiritual practice, reflected an intersection of Buddhist ritual and environmental activism.

CONCLUSION

From Jakarta’s Istiqlal Mosque to Buddhist forests in Thailand and South Korea’s tidal flats, faith-based environmental movements are proving to be a powerful force for ecological conservation. As global deforestation, climate change, and pollution continue to threaten ecosystems, religious communities are stepping up, leveraging spiritual teachings to address these challenges. Whether through Islamic fatwas, Buddhist tree ordinations, or interfaith environmental pilgrimages, these movements are transforming faith into action, promoting environmental stewardship as a sacred responsibility. Through their efforts, they remind us that care for the Earth is not just a political or economic issue, but a moral and spiritual one as well.

REFERENCES

- [1] Darlington, Susan. "Environmental Buddhism Across the Borders."
- [2] Redden, Molly. "The Evangelical Climate Initiative." The New Republic.
- [3] Pankaj Jain, "Hindu Environmental Teachings," HuffPost.
- [4] Scheid, Daniel P. "Dharmic Ecology: Hinduism and Environmentalism."
- [5] Bun Saluth, Venerable. "The Monks Community Forest in Cambodia."
- [6] Yoon and Jones, "Samboilbae: Buddhist Protest Tactics in South Korea."

- [7] Wein, Theodore. "Dhamma Walks for Environmental Awareness."
[8] Ramchandra Guha. "Global Environmentalism".
[9] Oxford University Press- Very Short Introduction, Environmental Politics.