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A Survey Study of Recent Works on Nasr's Eco-Religious Thought and Approach

Satu Tinjauan Terhadap Karya-Karya Terbaru Tentang Pemikiran dan Pendekatan Eco-Agama Nasr

Md. Abu Sayem *

Abstract

The current paper presents a brief survey study on recent works on Nasr's eco-religious thought and approach. The paper aims to analyse these works critically to focus how and up to what level their discussions can match with Nasr's original understanding. The research methodology is basically literature review with textual analysis. In so doing, the article attempts to enrich the present discussion on Nasr's eco-religious vision.

Keywords: Eco-philosophy, Eco-spirituality, Perennial philosophy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Sacredness of Nature, Sanctity of life.

Abstrak

Sebahagian cendekiawan berminat mempelajari pemikiran tradisional Seyyed Hossein Nasr mengenai persekitaran. Karya-karya mereka membantu tersebar nya pemikiran eko-agama Nasr secara penghargaan dan juga kritikan. Artikel ini mengkaji karya-karya terbaru mereka mengenai pemikiran dan pendekatan eko-agama Nasr untuk melihat sejauh mana karya-karya ini dapat disesuaikan dengan pemikirannya yang sebenar. Kaedah yang digunakan adalah menerusi tinjauan kajian-kajian lepas dan analisis teks. Artikel ini menyumbang kepada kepelbagaian karya-karya yang sedia ada mengenai pemikiran eko-agama Nasr.

Kata Kunci: Eco-filosofi, eco-spiritual, falsafah abadi, Sayed Hossein Nasr, rahsia alam, kesucian hidup.

Introduction

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's works have received wide attention from scholars. In the appreciation of his philosophical ideas, two edited volumes have been compiled; the first one is *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hos-*

*Associate Professor, Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka, Email: sayemwrcdu@gmail.com.

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*sein Nasr*¹, which is included in the series of volumes (no. xxvii) of The Library of Living Philosophers, and the second one is *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*². In these two works, scholars cover many issues of Nasr's thought complimented with their own understanding, appreciation and criticism. Apart from these two works, there are many other studies done on different aspects of Nasr's work. If anyone goes through all these scholarly discussions, s/he can roughly categorise these as Nasr's traditionalism, esoterism, perennialism, sacred science versus secular science, interfaith relations, environmental philosophy, eco-spirituality, Islamic world-view, Islamic environmental teachings, etc. We will narrow down the following analysis to Nasr's Islamic eco-religious thought.

Results and Discussion

In his book review of Nasr's *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, Haven O'Move states Nasr's ideas of God-Nature-Human relationship are a challenge to the present scientific world-view. He appreciates Nasr's suggestions for restoring the broken human-nature relationship but doubts its implementation in the present world by arguing that the technology-based society contradicts Nasr's proposal.³ Seemingly, O'Move's doubt is not illogical; but it is arguably true that a revolutionary reformation is required for maintaining ecological equilibrium, and to do this, Nasr's perennial philosophical vision of nature should be suggested. Nonetheless, O'Move's assessment is praiseworthy, for he recommends for policy makers to consult with Nasr's suggestions in order to address the ecological crisis from grass-root levels.⁴

Anton Heinen, in his book review of Nasr's *The Need for a Sacred Science*, presents a very brief idea of Nasr's concept of sacred science. For him, all of Nasr's arguments and suggestions are very ambi-

*Associate Professor, Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka (e-mail: sayemwrcdu@gmail.com).

¹ Lewis Edwin Hahn; Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001).

² Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Ed.), *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003).

³ Haven O'Move, (Book Review of *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), *Aperture*, 15(2), (Summer 1970): 58.

⁴ Haven O'Move, (Book Review of *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), *Aperture*, 15(2), (Summer 1970): 58.

tious for a permanent solution of ecological issues though he, like O'Move, doubts its applicability in societies that are already habituated to modern science and technology. Despite appreciating Nasr's innovative idea of sacred and traditional sciences, Heinen does not seem optimistic about achieving equilibrium in the relationship between humans and the environment based on Nasr's prescription by arguing that if Nasr's ideas are taken for granted, modern humans have to bury their hope for a truly human science.⁵ His general assessment can allow someone to think that he is in favour of human science, which should not be violated by sacred and traditional sciences. On this specific point, we contend that Nasr's sacred and traditional sciences should be given priority over human sciences because of a very basic question of existence. No one can disagree that survival comes before luxury; if it is logically true, Nasr's guidelines should not be considered impossible for application.

Lisa Wersel, in "Islam and Environmental Ethics: Traditional Responds to Contemporary Challenges", draws her conclusion by quoting Nasr's statement blaming the modern spiritual malaise as a constituting factor of the current ecological crisis.⁶ She appreciates Nasr's interpretation of the Quranic terms, for instance *muhit* as environment, in connection with the natural world. Wersel successfully makes Nasr's understanding of human responsibility to nature distinct from some other modern Islamic scholars of twentieth century, for example Gulzar Haider, Al-Hafiz Masri and Ismail Razi al-Faruqi among others. But she mixes Nasr's traditional approach with the views of Osman B. Bakar and Ziauddin Sardar as well as other prominent Islamic scholars. Though all these scholars equally criticize the modern scientific approach to nature, there is a substantial difference among them in terms of handling the environmental problems. For instance, Nasr's approach is more spiritual and traditional than that of Bakar and Sardar. Nasr is reluctant to reconcile with modernity while both Bakar and Sardar do not seem as rigid as Nasr.

In "Islam and the Environment: Theory and Practice", Mawil Izzi Dien refers to Nasr's *Islamic Cosmological Doctrine* to justify his assumption that there was no environmental problem in the Islamic Golden

⁵ Anton Heinen, (Book Review of *The Need for a Sacred Science*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society*, 85(4), (1994, December): 682.

⁶ Lisa Wersel, *Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges*, *Zygon*, 30 (3), (1995): 451-45.

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Age.⁷ It is true that there was no global environmental problem at that time, but there were some problems everywhere in human society with regard to the natural environment in the process of building cities and cultivating lands for producing food. With this in mind, we cannot claim that the Islamic Golden Age was completely free from any disturbance to the natural environment. Perhaps, Nasr wants to clarify that any massive destruction did not take place in the Golden Age, and a continuation of systematic degradation of the environment as it has been happening since the Industrial Revolution was not seen in traditional Muslims societies, and Muslim scientists never separated nature from its sacred character. Without a critical analysis of Nasr's preliminary statement, Dien makes an inconvenient assessment in his work⁸ on Nasr's description about Islam's Golden Age and its relation to the natural environment. Any scholarly evaluation of a scholar's overall views needs a thorough and comprehensive study of his works. On this point, we contend that Dien has reduced his creditability to assess Nasr's historical analysis of Muslims and the environment.

Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, in "Islamic Eco-theology based on the Quran", draws her conclusion by quoting Nasr's statements regarding the profound responsibilities of humans to God, their fellow-human beings and the whole creation.⁹ She appreciates Nasr's interpretation of the Divine Law (*al-Shariah*) by connecting the religious obligations of humans to the natural world.¹⁰ However, in our view, her analysis of Nasr's statement about the awareness of medieval Muslims regarding the possible threat of technologies to the environment seems flawed. In her view, Nasr argues that Muslims in the Middle Ages did not dare to come further in terms of technological advances just because of the possibility of destruction of the natural environment by technologies.¹¹ In this point, she makes a reference to Nasr's *Man and Nature*, but she cannot grasp Nasr's insightful description properly. It is an unfair assessment of

⁷ M. Izzi Dien, Islam and the Environment: Theory and Practice, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 18(1), (1997): 47-48.

⁸ M. Izzi Dien, Islam and the Environment: Theory and Practice, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 18(1), (1997): 47-57.

⁹ Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, Islamic Eco-theology based on the Quran, *Islamic Studies*, 37(2), (Summer 1998): 177.

¹⁰ Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, Islamic Eco-theology based on the Quran, *Islamic Studies*, 37(2), (Summer 1998): 177.

¹¹ Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, Islamic Eco-theology based on the Quran, *Islamic Studies*, 37(2), (Summer 1998): 176.

Nasr's words by overlooking what he wants to really mean. Nasr appreciates the way Muslim scientists have dealt with science to keep a balanced relationship between humans and nature, and did not develop a mechanistic and materialistic world-view as Western scientists and philosophers did. It would be unjust to claim that Muslims stopped furthering science and technology due to possible threats to the environment.

Both Leonard T. Librande and Egbert Giles Leigh, Jr., in their separate book reviews of Nasr's *Religion and the Order of Nature*, appreciate Nasr for bringing the environmental issue in connection with religions, though they constructively criticize Nasr's views of the environment in respect to application. For Librande, Nasr's suggestions will inspire those who believe in a single divine reality to think of restoring their relationship with nature though it is not an easy way to work accordingly, because the whole structure of society is now adapted with modern scientific knowledge and technological utilization.¹² Leigh criticizes Nasr's perennial philosophy by arguing that it does not actually suit with the Christian hereditary approach to sin,¹³ though Nasr's Christian eco-theological understanding is more sympathetic to Christianity even than many other Christian scholars.¹⁴ Despite their criticisms, their assessments of Nasr's understanding of nature seem fair, because these constructive criticisms allow other scholars to shed more light on Nasr's work.

In "Civilizational Dialogue on Environmental Philosophy: Nasr's 'Man and Nature' Revisited", Osman Bakar states Nasr's advocacy of man and nature relationship is a noteworthy initiative in environmental ethics.¹⁵ Bakar argues, Nasr's eco-philosophical thought and his spiritual world-view have played a pioneering role in forming an Islamic eco-religious ethics. He appreciates Nasr's efforts to bring the issue of ecological crisis to the intellectual agenda. A similar appreciation of Nasr is also seen in his *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The*

¹² Leonard T. Librande, (Book Review of *Religion and the Order of Nature*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 35(3), (Sum-Fall 1998): 515.

¹³ (Book Review of *Religion and the Order of Nature*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 44(2), (October 1998): 126.

¹⁴ Egbert Giles Leigh, Jr., (Book Review of *Religion and the Order of Nature*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr). *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 44(2), (October 1998): 126.

¹⁵ Osman Bakar, Civilizational Dialogue on Environmental Philosophy: Nasr's 'Man and Nature' Revisited in Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Ed.) *The Beacon of Knowledge: Essay in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2003).

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Islamic Heritage.¹⁶ At one point, Bakar seems critical of Nasr's metaphorical description of nature. For him, Nasr could not sufficiently convince a wider society about the significance of his discussion because of brief and vague analysis. On this point, we agree with him that Nasr's deep philosophical, symbolic and spiritual discussions are somewhat difficult to understand for a wide array of academic scholars as well as general readers. We also disagree with Bakar by arguing that if Nasr's earlier works are consulted with his later works, we will get a clearer understanding of what Nasr tries to make us understand about an intimacy between humans and the natural environment. Despite his criticism of Nasr's style of presentation, Bakar seems an admirer of Nasr's works. However, Bakar's critical study of Nasr's presentation inspires further study on Nasr's approach to environmental issues.

A short portion of Willis Jenkins's paper, "Islamic Law and Environmental Ethics: How Jurisprudence (*Usul al-Fiqh*) mobilizes practical Reform", compares Nasr's and Foltz's approaches to environmental ethics.¹⁷ For Jenkins, both Nasr and Foltz utilize Islamic moral teachings on the environment, but their stances are different. Nasr suggests a complete return to Islamic religious traditional view of nature while Foltz advocates a constructive reformation of Muslim attitudes and activities in nature. As far as Nasr's historical analysis is concerned, Jenkins seemingly overstates Nasr's statement that the classical Muslim urban setting was in harmony with the natural environment. Such a general statement of Jenkins on a historical subject without referring to some historical data and relevant contexts seems immature. Similarly, without offering a critical analysis he justifies Nasr's assertion that the historical periods of Islamic flourishing developed some ideal guidelines to properly treating the natural environment. If it is considered true, it means that nothing was happened in those periods of Islam that harmed the natural world, but there are many historical data which reveals that no classical society was completely free from degrading the environment, and even Islamic civilization was no exception. Based on only two works of Nasr,¹⁸ Jenkins

¹⁶ Osman Bakar, *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage* (University of Malaysia: Center for Civilizational Dialogue, 2007).

¹⁷ Willis J. Jenkins, Islamic Law and Environmental Ethics: How Jurisprudence (*Usul al-Fiqh*) mobilizes practical Reform, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture & Ecology*, 9(3), (2006): 338-364.

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, (1976); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis* in Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and

makes such superficial assessments of Nasr's Islamic view of environmental problems. If he could have consulted some other relevant works of Nasr more thoroughly, he would not have produced such an unmatched assumptions.

In his paper, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy, and Sustainability Education"¹⁹, Almut Beringer supports Nasr's religious-spiritual world-view. In his view, Nasr's understanding about the order of nature and sacred cosmology can work as an alternative worldview to environmental sustainability.²⁰ Beringer suggests including Nasr's perennial philosophical thought in the curriculum of environmental education in order to educate students about the necessity of revitalizing the human-nature relationship for a balanced and sustainable world. A noticeable problem is that Beringer supports Nasr's distinction between a spiritual world-view of nature and environmental ethics without a clear justification. By considering Nasr's understanding of nature as religious-spiritual knowledge of nature, Beringer also poses some problems. We wonder whether it is justifiable to make a reductionism in Nasr's whole understanding of the natural world to religious-spiritual knowledge of nature. We see, though Nasr's eco-spirituality can easily be identified with a traditional religious spiritual view of nature, it is more than that, because it is inclusive rather than exclusive and again it is exclusive rather than inclusive depending on how it is dealt with other things. It is monistic in the sense that it determines a central point of everything, and again it is pluralistic because it includes all things in a very deep connection. Such an ambiguous understanding of Nasr's spiritual view cannot be easily described. It needs more comprehensive analysis which is largely missed by Beringer. Nonetheless, his paper seems an innovative examination of Nasr's studies, for it attempts to explore why Nasr's view of nature is essential for environmental education.

Azizan Baharuddin (Eds.) *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions [Harvard Divinity School] with Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Almut Beringer, Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy and Sustainability Education, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 11 (1), (2006): 26-42.

²⁰ Almut Beringer, Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy and Sustainability Education, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 11 (1), (2006): 26.

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Anne Marieke Schwencke's thesis, *Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Traditionalism, Islamic Esotericism, and Environmental Ethics*²¹, gives an overview of Nasr's eco-philosophy. At some points, Schwencke's discussion creates some confusions. For example, in different places of his thesis he claims Nasr's approach is a theo-centric ethical approach. We argue, it is not fair to categorize his religious-spiritual world-view with any ethical approach, while Nasr himself describes the insufficiency of environmental ethics to address the ecological crisis.²² Besides, there is a debate among scholars to determine where his approach fits among the approaches of environmental ethics. For instance, Branch states Nasr's approach is a bio-centric understanding.²³ We can argue that Nasr actually promotes eco-centric environmental ethics, because Nasr suggests a very careful behavior with every element of the natural world; in this regard, even Nasr asserts more than other eco-centric environmental ethicists and theorists. Again, we can also contend that Nasr advocates an anthropo-centric approach, because the fifth principle of Nasr's traditional metaphysics shows humans at a central position as Schwencke himself interprets: "Man is viewed 'as the axis of this world, as the connection between the divine realms above and the terrestrial realms below, a bridge between 'Heaven and Earth'".²⁴ With all these arguments one can relate Nasr's world-view with various approaches of environmental ethics. It seems unfair to qualify Nasr's world-view with such a specific variety of centrism.

Munjed M. Murad of Harvard University develops his environmental understanding based on Nasr's works, particularly *Man and Nature*. In his paper, "Islamic Environmental Stewardship: Nature and Science in the Light of Islamic Philosophy"²⁵, Murad interprets the present

²¹ Anne Marieke Schwencke, *Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Traditionalism, Islamic Esotericism and Environmental Ethics*. (Unpublished BA Thesis in Religious Studies), (Leiden University: Institute of Religious Studies, 2009), 105.

²² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford Universe Press, 1996), 273.

²³ Michael Branch, (Book Review of *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue – An Interfaith Dialogue*, Ed. by Stephen C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder.), *Environmental History Review*, 17(2), (1 July, 1993): 89.

²⁴ Anne Marieke Schwencke, *Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Traditionalism, Islamic Esotericism and Environmental Ethics*. (Unpublished BA Thesis in Religious Studies), (Leiden University: Institute of Religious Studies, 2009), 28.

²⁵ Munjed M. Murad, Islamic Environmental Stewardship: Nature and Science in the Light of Islamic Philosophy, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 63(1-2), (2011): 145-163.

ecological crisis in line with Nasr's discussion. He rightly portrays Nasr's views in exploring the causes of environmental degradation; but at one point, possibly he misunderstands Nasr's analysis by arguing that "modern science can also serve as a contributed means to solving this crisis".²⁶ It is true, Nasr is aware of the use of green technology to temporally reduce some environmental problems, but he always calls for returning to the traditional sciences where the sacred science is seen at the centre for conducting all human activities in nature and forming a balanced view of the God-Nature-Human relationship. Nasr always suggests abandoning modern science and technology for a permanent solution to the present ecological crisis. He never sees using green technologies as an alternative to the sacred science and traditional sciences. Thanks to Murad for revising his assessment in a more modified version of the same paper²⁷, published as "Inner and Outer Nature: An Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis". However, Murad's two papers are a praise worthy endeavour of Islamic eco-religious guidelines in connection with Nasr's view of nature, science, and the position of humans between them.

Nasr is placed at the top of Islamic eco-thinkers listed by Arthur Saniotis in "Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics".²⁸ In his short evaluation of Nasr's role in revitalizing religious views of the environment, Saniotis's study seems noteworthy, but it is too brief to estimate Nasr's significant contribution to fostering eco-Islamic teachings for environmental sustainability. Besides, at two points his discussion seems confused regarding Nasr's view of the God-Nature-Human relationship. First, referring to Nasr's *Man and Nature*, Saniotis attempts to show that a human-centric approach is also supported by Nasr.²⁹ Without further clarification about it, such generalization about Nasr's persistence for "re-discovery of the anatomy of being"³⁰ is irrelevant. Second, based on secondary sources he focuses the outer side of

²⁶ Munjed M. Murad, Islamic Environmental Stewardship: Nature and Science in the Light of Islamic Philosophy, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 63(1-2), (2011): 150.

²⁷ Munjed M. Murad, Inner and Outer Nature: An Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis, *Journal of Islam and Science*, 10(2), (2012): 132.

²⁸ A. Saniotis, Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic environmental Ethics, *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012):155-171.

²⁹ A. Saniotis, Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic environmental Ethics, *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012):166.

³⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1976 [1968]), 116.

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nature and compares it as “a visible icon”,³¹ while Nasr discusses both the inner and outer side of nature equally. Nature, as Nasr depicts it, is not reality; but rather shows us the appearance of reality, only God is the Real. Nasr criticizes secular science for only involving the appearances of reality, while overlooking the Real, the Creator. So, Saniotis's identifying nature only with an apparent substance makes a partial interpretation of Nasr's understanding of nature.

Bahar Davary's “Islam and Ecology: Southeast Asia, Adat, and the Essence of *Keramat*”³² investigates transnational view of nature from an ecumenical, interfaith and inter-cultural perspective focusing a case study on Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. At the first half of her paper, Davary diagnoses briefly the historical factors of environmental degradation. As for the destructive causes of the present ecological crisis, she supports the arguments of Lynn White and Seyyed Hossein Nasr that the rift between culture and nature is the root cause of ecological crisis³³. But, to some points, she amalgamates Nasr's visionary thought with White's historical analysis by a way of juxtaposing their insightful comments in regard to religion and nature. White and Nasr share admittedly some common points in relation to the causes of environmental destruction, but their ways of presenting religions in regard to the causes are different, which is missed in Davary's discussion. The way White criticizes Christianity in terms of human supremacy Nasr does not do. Similarly, Nasr's traditional and spiritual world-view is distinct from White's understanding of the solution. Nonetheless, Davary's work seems valuable in regard to Nasr's religious advocacy of the human-nature relationship, because she also attempts to prove that environmental degradation is the result of an attitude problem by focusing on Nasr's argument that ecological crisis began when humans lost the sense of the sacredness of nature.

A detailed discussion about Nasr's traditional view of the environment is found in Tarik M. Quadir's *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*.³⁴ Quadir attempts to present

³¹ A. Saniotis, Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic environmental Ethics, *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012):126.

³² Bahar Davary, Islam and Ecology: Southeast Asia, *Adat*, and the Essence of *Keramat*, *ASIA Network Exchange*, 20(1), (Fall 2012): 2-22.

³³ Bahar Davary, Islam and Ecology: Southeast Asia, *Adat*, and the Essence of *Keramat*, *ASIA Network Exchange*, 20(1), (Fall 2012): 12.

³⁴ Tarik M. Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013).

Nasr's view of ecological crisis comprehensively and systematically.³⁵ Quadir seems a proponent of Nasr's entire vision of nature. By refuting the criticisms against Nasr's traditional world-view, he contends that Nasr does not ignore temporary solutions to the present ecological crisis on which many environmental ethicists and environmental movements are working, but Nasr seeks a permanent solution to it. As Nasr sees, the present destructive human perceptions of nature is a direct result of the modern scientific world-view, it allows him to convince humans about the threatening attitudes of this world-view in order to bring them back to a sustainable and balancing approach to nature, which still exists in the traditional world-view in Nasr's words. In Quadir's view, though externally Nasr's suggestion may seem unrealistic, it would be unfair to consider his approach to ecological crisis as impracticable,³⁶ because Nasr also suggests utilizing the least destructive technologies, fixing technological boundaries and restoring traditional tools in production for reducing environmental problems. But Nasr thinks more deeply than all these temporary and conventional measures, because Nasr's goal is to reform the perceptions of modern humans through introducing the total truth of the universe, and to bring humans back to a spiritual-religious world-view of nature from a mechanistic-materialistic world-view. We appreciate Quadir for such a courageous initiative to explicitly present Nasr's vision of nature. His book will help the current research project to have a more comprehensive understanding of Nasr's eco-theological understanding.

Cory Wensley investigates how Nasr's mystic diagnosis of ecological crisis was influenced by the spiritual thought of the thirteenth century Muslim mystic, Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī. In his thesis, *What was said to the Rose that made it open, was said to me, here, in my Chest: The Influence of Jalal al-Din Rumi in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Sufi Diagnosis of the Environmental Crisis*, Wensley contends that Rumi's metaphysical and spiritual view of nature may have some influences on the formation of Nasr's eco-spiritual thought.³⁷ In his analysis, he argues

³⁵ Tarik M. Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013), 234.

³⁶ Tarik M. Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013), 235.

³⁷ Cory Lee Wensley, *What was said to the Rose that made it open, was said to me, here, in my Chest: The Influence of Jalal al-Din Rumi in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Sufi Diagnosis of the Environmental Crisis*, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis in Theology and Religious Studies), (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Saint Mary's University, 2015).

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that possibly at four points Rumi's mystic interpretations are resonated in Nasr's thoughts of nature: (1) mystic contemplation of nature as a sign / symbol of God, and God's intimacy with the whole creation; (2) perfection of humans in knowing God; (3) humans are caretakers of God's creatures; and (4) deficiency of human knowledge. Anyone who goes through Nasr's works on environmental issues cannot reject Wensley's analysis about all these philosophical grounds of Nasr's thought, which he sees in Rūmī's mystic philosophy. Wensley's discussion is very brief on such an important study, it should be more interpretive.

In "The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape", Asfa Widiyanto shows how Indonesian scholars accept Nasr's ideas.³⁸ Referring to some works of Indonesian scholars, Widiyanto is convinced that Nasr's criticism of the modern world-view and his advocacy of spiritual world-view have "left an impression in the mind of some Indonesian intellectuals" keeping them more aware of environmental problems.³⁹ For him, all these Indonesian scholars agree with Nasr's God-Human-Nature relationship and they attempt to interpret it in Indonesian academy both through English and local languages. Widiyanto's finding shows Nasr's ideas more influential in the academic community rather than activist or environmental movements.⁴⁰ As for Nasr's world-view, Widiyanto's analysis seems right that Nasr's thought is not impartial. We support his statement by arguing that Nasr's thought comes from a particular world-view mostly related with perennial philosophical and spiritual understanding. In one point, Widiyanto's assumption for Islamic science in opposition to Western or modern science seems an exaggeration of Nasr's understanding of science with regard to the conceptions of sacred science and traditional sciences. According to Nasr's interpretation, all authentic religious traditions are illuminated by the sacred science and share the traditional sciences. To some points, Nasr focuses on the formation of Islamic traditional science compared with the formation of Western science and talks about the con-

³⁸ Asfa Widiyanto, The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape, *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 23(2), (2016): 193-236.

³⁹ Asfa Widiyanto, The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape, *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 23(2), (2016): 223.

⁴⁰ Asfa Widiyanto, The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape, *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 23(2), (2016): 223.

tributions of Muslim scientists to science in comparison with Western scientists. Perhaps Nasr has not qualified science with Islamic, but he insists on sacred science by suggesting that science and technology should be handled in line with sacred science. As far as ecological crisis is concerned, Widiyanto's analysis on Nasr's eco-philosophical and eco-theological understanding seems clearer than that of many other contemporary scholars.

In his Ph.D. Dissertation, "*In Search of a Christian-Muslim Common Path from Desacralization to Resacralization of Nature: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis*"⁴¹, Ian Mevorach investigates the possibility of Christian-Muslim dialogue on environmental degradation by making a comparative study between Nasr's and McFague's eco-religious views. Referring to some of their works, Mevorach shows that Nasr and McFague commonly share some basic points in regard to ecological crisis. For him, since both scholars consider the present environmental problem a consequence of desacralization of nature by modern humans, they suggest, though differently, resacralizing nature for a solution to the current ecological crisis through revitalizing "a spiritual vision of nature"⁴². After exploring their distinctive models, Mevorach argues that Nasr's traditional approach and McFague's innovative approach are needed to "articulate a compelling and intellectually viable ecological theology and ethics in the 21st century"⁴³. We agree with Mevorach that both scholars focus on a complete shift from the present mechanistic world-view to an organic world-view, but their approaches are different from one another. In some points, he enthusiastically juxtaposes both scholars' insightful thematic discussions into a common point. For example, he understands Nasr's "universal man" with McFague's "universal self" to be at the same level without showing sufficient distinctions between the two terms, while these terms came out of

⁴¹ Ian Mevorach, *In Search of a Christian Muslim Common Path from Desacralization to Resacralization of Nature: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), (Boston University: School of Theology, 2015).

⁴² Ian Mevorach, *In Search of a Christian Muslim Common Path from Desacralization to Resacralization of Nature: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), (Boston University: School of Theology, 2015), vii.

⁴³ Ian Mevorach, *In Search of a Christian Muslim Common Path from Desacralization to Resacralization of Nature: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), (Boston University: School of Theology, 2015), 33.

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two different backgrounds – one is from a traditional religious view of man, and the other is from a post-modern genderless perspective. It may lead to a misunderstanding between the said scholars. Another major problem is that Mevorach views Nasr's understanding of *al-Muhit* as close to McFague's understanding of the world as "the Body of God". There are some basic distinctions between these two terms; *al-Muhit* is one of the names of God Who environs all things, but "the Body of God" is not a name of God and also not a biblical term. While *al-Muhit* is not a result of Nasr's speculative conception, the Body of God concept is innovated by McFague to justify her eco-theological approach. All these basic differences should be clarified before showing a similarity between them. Notwithstanding, Mevorach's dissertation is a brave initiative to encourage a Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue on ecological issues. His noteworthy work inspires the ongoing study to go forward to this field by relating Nasr with another Christian eco-theologian like Cobb.

Salamuddin's paper, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Concept of the Relationship between Man, Nature, and God,"⁴⁴ presents a survey of Nasr's understanding of the God-Nature-Human relationship. Referring to some recent responses to Nasr's eco-theological thought, Salamuddin states that Nasr's academic research relating to traditional religious views of the natural environment inspires scholars to debate on the role of religions in mitigating the present ecological crisis. Salamuddin seems very enthusiast to accept Nasr's all frameworks without any further critical analysis for the solution of the present environmental problem. This concerns us that Nasr's prescriptions are difficult to implement in actual fields. For instance, Nasr's interpretation of sacred science and traditional science are still vague to understand. Nasr's advocacy of going back to a traditional understanding of nature and of completely discarding the modern scientific understanding of nature for revitalizing the human-nature relationship are not an universal method to reform the present human perceptions of nature and their activities in the environment. Besides, Salamuddin unnecessarily asserts that Nasr wants to transform the present modernity into a religious modernity and to treat nature like a human being. Salamuddin exaggerates Nasr's view of nature in a misunderstood way. Admittedly, Nasr always advocates going back to a tradi-

⁴⁴ Salamuddin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Concept of the Relationship between Man, Nature and God, *Karsa: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, 25(1), (June 2017): 33-56.

tional understanding of nature, but he did not characterize modernity with religious modernity. Nasr suggests respecting nature as something living not dead, but we doubt whether he considers nature like a human being. We wonder how Salamuddin can mix Nasr's sacred science with traditional science while Nasr makes distinction between sacred science and traditional science. We disagree with Salamuddin's concluding remarks that Nasr's suggestions should be reached all people. Like him, we also want to see the spread of Nasr's words to a wider array of people, but Nasr's particular world-view, developed from a traditional religious understanding, will get more reactions from atheist and secular people. Such exaggerations and misunderstanding may come due to Salamuddin's insufficient consultation of Nasr's works.

In his recent publications⁴⁵, Md. Abu Sayem reviews Seyyed Hossein Nasr's eco-religious understanding and suggestions both from theoretical and practical points of view. Though Sayem mostly appreciates Nasr for revitalizing the value of wisdom traditions of the world in regard to ecological equilibrium, he is also somewhat critical of Nasr's theoretical analysis.⁴⁶ Sayem contends, Nasr should also think of some practical steps like green technological initiatives and renewable energy sources. However, Sayem is an admirer of Nasr's eco-religious understanding and attempts connecting the ongoing discussions of ecological crisis with Nasr. It is evident, through his extensive works on Nasr's ecological vision, Sayem tries to show why Nasr's eco-religious view is necessary for rereading from a perspective of environmental sustainability and how his eco-religious suggestions can motivate modern humans to

⁴⁵ Md. Abu Sayem, Religions and Environmental Sustainability: Focusing Some Practical Approaches by John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 6(1), (2021): 65-80; Md. Abu Sayem, *Religious Perspectives on Environmental Issues: A Comparative Study of John B. Cobb, Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, (unpublished PhD Dissertation in Religious Studies), (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2020); Md. Abu Sayem, Religious Perspectives on Environmental Issues: Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Md. Abu Sayem, *Islamic Studies*, 59(2), (2020): 255-268; Md. Abu Sayem, Religions and Environmental Ethics: A Comparative Study of John B. Cobb, Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 4(3), (2019): 34-50, 2019; Md. Abu Sayem, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Works on Environmental Issues: A Survey, *Islamic Studies*, 58(3), (2019): 439-451; Md. Abu Sayem, The Eco-Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Spiritual Crisis and Environmental Degradation, *Islamic Studies*, 58(2), (2019): 271-295; Md. Abu Sayem, A Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of Environmental Sustainability, *Journal of Islam in Asia*, 15(2), (2018): 312-328.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

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protect the natural environment. Admittedly, some scholars are becoming familiar with Nasr's eco-philosophical realization of nature through his such works.⁴⁷ In this way, Sayem's works can contribute more to presenting Nasr's eco-spiritual vision as an alternative aspect to the technological redesigning steps.

Conclusion

In the preceding discussions on Nasr's traditional vision of nature, we have gone through the latest five book reviews, fourteen research papers, four books and three unpublished theses, in which scholars are found evaluating Nasr's eco-philosophical, eco-spiritual and eco-religious world-view of the environment. In all these research works, the authors have examined Nasr's views of nature and his eco-religious prescriptions from their own understanding of human-nature relationship. Arguably true, most scholars have appreciated Nasr for bringing the present unprecedented ecological crisis to the spiritual realization of the essentiality of ecological equilibrium, while some other scholars have assessed Nasr's traditional / religious / spiritual worldview of nature from certain critical points of view. Though Nasr's eco-spiritual concepts and suggestions appear externally impractical, as viewed by certain authors, no one can deny the significance of his traditional environmentalism in relation to the gravity of the ecological crisis. The way Nasr attempts to connect the natural world with human heart is still unexplored by our contemporary scholars, which can motivate humans to rectify their own actions in the environment. Here we find the core significance of Nasr's works on the environment, which presents Nasr relevant for any discussion on ecological issues. As Nasr calls for the practitioners of religious traditions of the world to revitalize their religious views of nature to develop a closer affinity with the environment, Nasr should be re-read more from some other perspectives. In this short survey study, it is not possible to give a detail account of all the scholarly works done on Nasr's ecological vision. For time constrains and words limitation, the present study has selected the above latest works to make my readers familiar with Nasr's ecological vision and researches on it. Keeping this limitation in

⁴⁷ For instance, Professor Rashida Akhter Khanam (of Philosophy Department at the University of Dhaka [Bangladesh]), being inspired by Sayem, is writing now on Nasr, whereas she states: "I am working on Nasr's *Man and Nature*. Thanks for inspiring me to read Nasr." (personal communication, 3 October 2020).

hand, the current research suggests further studied on the same topic by enlisting some more research works on Nasr.

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