



## **ECO-SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN WORLD RELIGIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Indigenous spiritualities, faiths and belief systems often incorporate deep ecological knowledge passed down through generations. These traditions highlight sustainable living and harmony with nature, offering valuable perspectives for modern environmental education. Religious faiths can both positively and negatively impact environmental awareness. When aligned with ecological values, they provide a powerful foundation for fostering sustainable attitudes and behaviours, making them valuable partners in environmental education. In this paper, we have highlighted the teachings of environmental education as perceived in both Western religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as well as Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Laoism, Confucianism and Shintoism).

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Environmental education is a crucial component of sustainable development, and its inclusion in the primary school curriculum plays a vital role in shaping young minds (Parker, 2017; Fergusson et al., 2018). At an early age, children are highly receptive to new ideas, and introducing environmental concepts during this formative period fosters awareness, responsibility, and proactive behaviour toward nature (Parker, 2017; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2019). By integrating topics such as pollution, conservation, climate change, and biodiversity into core subjects like science, social studies, and even art, educators can create meaningful learning experiences that promote eco-consciousness (Hitzhusen, 2006; Gardner, 2010). This early exposure encourages students to adopt environmentally friendly habits and

empowers them to become informed citizens who care about the planet.

Therefore, enhancing environmental awareness through curriculum-based strategies is not just beneficial but essential for building a generation that is prepared to tackle future environmental challenges (Parker, 2017; Hitzhusen, 2006). Integrating environmental education into the primary school curriculum is essential for fostering early environmental awareness and responsible behaviour among children (Fergusson et al., 2018). One very interesting aspect of understanding regarding environmental education and awareness is how our young minds are being trained socio-culturally towards this green philosophy through the lens of various religions and faiths (Gardner, 2010; Parker, 2017; Jiang and Zhang, 2020).

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### **From the Perspectives of Western Religions Environmental Education in Judaism**

Environmental education in Judaism is deeply rooted in traditional Jewish texts, ethics, and practices (Swan, 1978). Jewish teachings emphasize stewardship of the Earth, responsibility for creation, and sustainable living (Smith, 2019; Yang and Lu, 2024). Here's an overview of key concepts and sources related to environmental education in Judaism:

#### **Biblical Foundations**

**Genesis (Bereishit):** Humanity is placed in the Garden of Eden *"to work it and to guard it"* (l'ovdah ul'shomrah - Genesis 2:15), a foundational verse for Jewish environmental ethics. This teaches both productive use and protective responsibility (Yang and Lu, 2024). **Sabbath and Sabbatical Year:** The Shabbat (weekly Sabbath) and Shmita (sabbatical year) demonstrate values of rest, balance, and allowing the land to rejuvenate (Exodus 23:10-12, Leviticus 25).

#### **Rabbinic Teachings**

**Bal Tashchit (Do Not Destroy):** A prohibition against needless destruction, first stated in Deuteronomy 20:19-20, when cutting trees during war, but expanded by the rabbis to a broader environmental ethic.

**Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim:** The principle against causing unnecessary suffering to animals, reinforcing respect for all living creatures.

**Responsibility and Interconnectedness:** Rabbinic literature often discusses the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, urging ethical living and accountability for environmental impact.

#### **Jewish Holidays and the Environment**

**Tu B'Shvat:** Traditionally a time for planting trees, it has become a central holiday for Jewish environmental education and advocacy.

**Sukkot:** Living in temporary shelters highlights simplicity, dependence on nature, and gratitude for the harvest.

**Passover:** Discussions of slavery and liberation can also include themes of environmental justice and responsibility.

Jewish Environmental Organizations, such as groups like Hazon, the Jewish Climate Initiative, and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) promote environmental awareness and action within Jewish communities (Parker, 2017; Smith, 2019; Santos, 2023). Eco-Kashrut is an extension of traditional kosher laws to include ethical considerations about food production, sustainability, and environmental impact. Many synagogues and

Jewish educational institutions incorporate sustainability into their infrastructure and curricula (Smith, 2019; Santos, 2023; Yang and Lu, 2024).

Torah-based curriculum has been incorporated in Jewish schools and camps often integrate environmental topics into religious studies, using texts and mitzvot to frame ecological responsibility (Parker, 2017; Smith, 2019; Santos, 2023). Programs include gardening, composting, celebrating Jewish holidays with ecological themes (e.g., Tu B'Shvat as the "New Year of the Trees"), and nature-based retreats. Tree planting, clean-up projects, and sustainable lifestyle challenges are increasingly part of Jewish communal life (Parker, 2017; Smith, 2019; Santos, 2023).

#### **Environmental Education in Christianity**

Environmental education in Christianity is grounded in the belief that the Earth is God's creation and that humans are stewards of it (Salemink and Turner, 2014; Smith, 2019; Yang and Lu, 2024). This concept is often referred to as "creation care." Here's an overview of how environmental education is approached within Christianity:

**Biblical Foundations:** Genesis 1:26-28: Humans are given "dominion" over the Earth, but this is increasingly interpreted as responsible stewardship rather than exploitation.

Genesis 2:15: Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden *"to till it and keep it,"* highlighting a duty to protect and care for the environment.

Psalms 24:1: *"The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,"* emphasizing that nature belongs to God, not humans.

Theological themes highlight that Christians are caretakers of God's creation (Swan, 1978). This includes protecting ecosystems, conserving resources, and acting against pollution (Salemink and Turner, 2014; Smith, 2019; Santos, 2023). Environmental degradation often impacts the poor and vulnerable first, tying creation care to Christian concerns for social justice (Parker, 2017; Yang and Lu, 2024). The idea of rest and renewal (for people and the land) promotes sustainability and respect for natural cycles (Swan, 1978; Salemink and Turner, 2014; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2019; Yang and Lu, 2024).

Organizations such as A Rocha, Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), and Laudato Si' Movement promote environmental awareness and action from a faith-based perspective (Swan, 1978; Yang and Lu, 2024). Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* is a major Catholic document addressing

climate change, sustainability, and ecological spirit. Many churches include creation care in Sunday school, sermons, Bible studies, and youth programs. Activities may include tree planting, recycling drives, and educational seminars on climate change and conservation. Teaching about eco-friendly lifestyles is a moral responsibility ((Swan, 1978; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2019; Yang and Lu, 2024). Encouraging sustainable practices such as energy conservation, ethical consumption, and habitat preservation as well as promoting prayer and reflection on humanity's relationship with nature are important aspects of environmental education for many practicing and devoted Christians (Swan, 1978; Parker, 2017; Yang and Lu, 2024).

### **Environmental Education in Islam**

Islam places significant emphasis on the protection and preservation of the environment. Environmental education, within the Islamic framework, is not just a modern academic subject; but, an integral aspect of faith and daily living (Alshater et al., 2021, Ismail, 2018). It promotes a worldview where humans are stewards of the Earth, entrusted with the responsibility to maintain its balance and sustainability (Alshater et al., 2021; Swammar and Mohammad, 2021).

In Islam, human beings are regarded as *khalifah* (stewards or vicegerents) of the Earth: As Qur'an (2:30) says: "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (*khalifah*)." This implies a divine trust upon humans to care for the environment, not exploit it. Environmental education in Islam teaches individuals their duty to protect natural resources, ensure sustainability, and pass on a healthy planet to future generations (Ismail, 2018; Alshater et al., 2021).

Islam stresses that Allah created everything in perfect balance. According to Qur'an (55:7-9): "*And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance - That you not transgress within the balance.*" Environmental education from this perspective includes understanding the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the consequences of disrupting natural harmony, such as through pollution, deforestation, or climate change (Alshater et al., 2021; Wakhidah and Erman, 2022).

Islam condemns extravagance and wastefulness. The Qur'an (7:31) says: "...*Eat and drink, but do not waste. Surely, He does not like the wasteful.*" This principle encourages conservation, responsible consumption, and sustainable living-key teachings in environmental education (Ahmed and Gianci, 2005). Islam teaches that all creatures are communities like humans (Alshater et al., 2021). The Qur'an (6:38) quotes:

*"There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature on two wings, but they are communities like you."* This informs Islamic environmental education to respect biodiversity and protect animal habitats (Ahmed and Gianci, 2005; Wakhidah and Erman, 2022).

Prophetic traditions (Hadith) encourage active care for nature. The Hadith preaches: "*If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him.*" (Bukhari). The Hadith further mentions: "*If the Hour (the Day of Judgment) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him plant it.*" (Ahmad). These teachings underline the Islamic encouragement of proactive environmental action, even in the face of global calamity (Alshater et al., 2021). Water is considered a sacred gift in Islam (Alshater et al., 2021). According to Hadith: The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) performed ablution (*wudu*) using very little water, setting an example for conserving water resources. Environmental education in Islam involves learning practical ways to preserve water, a theme highly relevant in modern ecological discussions (Ahmed and Gianci, 2005).

Islam links environmental care with social responsibility and justice (*adl*); such as fair distribution of resources, protection of vulnerable communities from environmental harm, and accountability for polluting or damaging shared resources (Alshater et al., 2021). In Islam, environmental education is deeply spiritual and ethical, promoting a harmonious relationship between humans and nature (Ahmed and Gianci, 2005). It emphasizes responsibility, balance, conservation, and compassion. By rooting ecological awareness in faith, Islam inspires both individual and collective action to protect the environment as an act of worship and moral duty (Wakhidah and Erman, 2022).

### **From the Perspectives of Eastern Religions Environmental Education in Hinduism**

The essence of modern environmental education reflected in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is a compelling and meaningful concept (Dwivedi, 1993). It invites a fusion of ancient spiritual wisdom with contemporary ecological awareness—a synthesis that is increasingly valuable in today's environmentally challenged world (Okafer and Stella, 2018; Basak, 2024). Here's a breakdown of how the *Bhagavad Gita* reflects principles aligned with modern environmental education as the Unity of All Life and Ecocentrism (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Agarwal, 2018; Jain 2022)). The *Gita* emphasizes the

interconnectedness of all beings. For instance, in Chapter 5, Verse 18, it says: "*The humble sage, by virtue of true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle Brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater.*" This mirrors ecocentric thinking—a core tenet of environmental education—which values all life forms equally and promotes coexistence (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Jain, 2022; Basak, 2024).

### **Duty (Dharma) and Environmental Stewardship**

Krishna urges Arjuna to act according to his dharma (duty). Today, environmental educators call for a sense of individual and collective responsibility for protecting nature (Dwivedi, 1993). The Gita's call to perform one's righteous duty can be interpreted as a call to ecological duty in the modern context (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Basak, 2024). The Gita discourages attachment to material possessions and advocates a life of moderation, which aligns with principles of sustainability (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Okafer and Stella 2018; Jain, 2022). This is seen in Chapter 6, Verse 16-17, which promotes a balanced lifestyle (Basak, 2024). In Chapter 3, Krishna describes the cycle of nature as a form of *yajna* (sacred offering), stating that living beings should live in harmony with the cycles of giving and receiving (Dwivedi, 1993). This echoes the systems-thinking approach in environmental education, where maintaining natural cycles is crucial for ecological balance (Agarwal, 2018; Okafer and Stella, 2018).

The Gita places emphasis on inner transformation and self-awareness, a foundational principle of education (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Basak, 2024). True environmental change begins with inner change—developing environmental ethics, empathy, and mindfulness (Agarwal, 2018; Okafer and Stella, 2018). The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, while ancient, holds timeless wisdom that resonates with modern environmental principles: Respect for all life, Responsible action, Simplicity, Ecological interconnectedness and Ethical living (Dwivedi, 1993; Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Okafer and Stella, 2018). As such, it can serve as a powerful philosophical and ethical foundation for environmental education (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Jain, 2022), particularly in culturally relevant contexts like India or in global discussions on spiritual ecology (Okafer and Stella 2018; Basak, 2024).

### **Environmental Education according to Swami Vivekananda**

Swami Vivekananda, one of India's most profound spiritual leaders and thinkers, did not explicitly use the modern term "*environmental education*," (Jain, 2022) but his teachings are rich with principles that

align closely with environmental consciousness and sustainability (Dwivedi, 1993). Reflections of Environmental Education in the Teachings of Swami Vivekananda are discussed below:

**Unity of Existence and Nature:** Swami Vivekananda emphasized the oneness of all beings. He believed that everything in the universe—human beings, animals, plants, and the environment—is interconnected and manifestations of the same universal consciousness. He mentioned, "*Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.*" This belief promotes a respect for nature as sacred, and encourages living in harmony with the environment (Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, 1981). Vivekananda drew from Vedantic philosophy which considers nature not as inert matter, but as a living and divine entity. This promotes an intrinsic reverence for the natural world, an idea foundational to modern ecological ethics. By encouraging spiritual growth through contemplation of nature, Vivekananda indirectly promotes environmental stewardship (Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, 1981). He advocated a simple, disciplined lifestyle, which aligns with sustainable living (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Jain, 2022). Minimizing material consumption and practicing contentment reduce strain on natural resources. These ideals can be linked to modern movements like minimalism and sustainable consumption (Fergusson *et al.*, 2018).

Vivekananda's principle of "*Seva*" (selfless service) extends to all beings, not just humans. Environmental education today emphasizes the need to protect biodiversity and serve future generations by preserving nature (Jain, 2022). He said, "*They alone live who live for others.*" Serving others includes protecting the environment, which supports all life. Swami Vivekananda strongly believed in education as the manifestation of perfection already in man. He advocated for holistic education that includes moral, spiritual, and intellectual richness. Environmental education fits well within this framework developing responsible, ethical, and aware individuals who can think critically about their relationship with the earth. Swami Vivekananda placed immense trust in the power of youth. He urged them to be courageous, morally upright, and socially responsible (Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, 1981).

Today's environmental challenges need youth involvement. Vivekananda's vision inspires young people to lead environmental movements and become agents of change. Swami Vivekananda's teachings offer a profound moral and spiritual foundation for

environmental education (Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, 1981). By emphasizing unity, self-discipline, reverence for nature, and social responsibility, his philosophy encourages a sustainable and ethical relationship with the natural world (Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, 1981). Educators can draw on his ideas to foster an environmental ethic rooted in values, not just facts (Sargeant and Chapple, 2009; Agarwal, 2018).

### **Environmental Education in Buddhism**

Environmental education as perceived through Buddhism, explores how Buddhist philosophy and teachings can inform and shape environmental education (Wu and Lee, 2021; Jain, 2022). Buddhism defines environmental education as a process that enables individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving, and take action to improve the environment (Ranjan, 2014; Wu and Lee, 2021). Buddhist teachings provide a valuable framework for environmental education by promoting compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence (Ranjan, 2014; Agarwal, 2018; Wu and Lee, 2021).

The core Buddhist principles (Ranjan, 2014) relevant to Environmentalism include:

**Interdependence (Pratityasamutpada):** Everything is interconnected; harming nature is harming oneself.

**Ahimsa (Non-violence):** Extending non-harm to all living beings and the planet.

**Mindfulness (Sati):** Being present and aware of one's actions and their impact on the environment.

**Simplicity and Non-attachment:** Reducing consumption, detaching from materialism.

The environmental ethics in Buddhist teachings is highlighted in the firm of the First Precept: "*Do not harm any living being*" – includes animals and nature. The Middle Way teaches, "*Avoiding extremes in consumption and behaviour.*" The principle of Metta (Loving-kindness) and Karuna (Compassion) teaches "Encouraging care for all life for all life forms." Buddhism teaches ecological responsibility through moral and spiritual values (Wu and Lee, 2021). It specifically emphasizes upon experiential practices like meditation and nature walks to cultivate mindfulness and appreciation of nature (Jiang and Zhang, 2020). Buddhism encourages collective action inspired by Sangha (community) principles (Wu and Lee, 2021; Jain, 2022).

Numerous case studies support and highlight these practical principles of Buddhism (Ranjan, 2014). For

example, forest monasteries in Thailand promoting forest conservation (Wu and Lee, 2021; Agarwal, 2018). Buddhist-led environmental movements (e.g., Bhutan's Gross National Happiness, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's environmental statements) have immense global significance (Wu and Lee, 2021; Jain, 2022). Integration of Buddhist philosophy into eco-education programs in Sri Lanka, Japan, Bhutan, Thailand, Myanmar, Mongolia Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Tibet are classical examples (Ranjan, 2014; Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021).

The Tibetan refugee community settled in various parts of India after the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959. One of the prominent settlements is in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, which offered a similar climate and terrain to their native land. Their adaptation to this new ecological, socio-cultural and socio-economic environment is a remarkable example of cultural resilience and environmental integration. Their choice of settlement area is related to the fact that Darjeeling's cool, temperate climate and hilly terrain are quite similar to parts of the Tibetan Plateau. The area was chosen due to its proximity to the Himalayan belt and existing Buddhist communities, easing cultural transition. Tibetans brought traditional crafts like carpet weaving, woollen garments, and handmade artefacts, adapting materials locally available (like Indian wool). Though limited due to terrain, some adapted to terrace farming and horticulture. Many have become part of Darjeeling's tourism economy, selling handicrafts, running restaurants, and engaging in cultural tourism.

Tibetan houses are built using locally available materials like wood and stone, maintaining traditional Tibetan architectural elements. Roofing and drainage systems were adapted to manage heavy monsoonal rain-unlike Tibet's drier climate. Buddhist monasteries often promote conservation, non-violence towards nature, and sustainable practices. The Tibetan festivals are celebrated in harmony with the agricultural and ecological calendar of the region (e.g., Losar, Saga Dawa). However, increasing population density and tourism in Darjeeling have led to environmental degradation, impacting the Tibetan settlements too. Seasonal water shortage is a challenge in the hilly terrain. Some Tibetan-run establishments promote eco-tourism and socio-cultural awareness based on traditional Buddhist traditions, faiths and principles.

Tibetan schools have string emphasis for environmental education as part of their curriculum. The Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling have shown a

remarkable ability to ecologically adapt to their environment while preserving their unique Buddhist cultural identity. Their integration demonstrates a model of sustainable living, community cohesion, and resilience amidst displacement through their strong faith in Buddhist traditions and belief systems. Buddhism offers a holistic, compassionate, and ethical perspective on environmental education. Integrating Buddhist values into environmental curricula can nurture responsible, empathetic, and sustainable attitudes toward the Earth.

### **Environmental Education in Jainism**

Environmental education in Jainism is deeply rooted in its spiritual and ethical principles, emphasizing non-violence (ahimsa), compassion, and the interconnectedness of all life forms (Ray, 1984; Agarwal, 2018). Here's an overview of how environmental education is perceived in Jainism:

**Ahimsa (Non-Violence)** towards all living beings: The core of Jain philosophy is ahimsa, or non-violence, which extends not only to humans and animals; but, also to plants, microorganisms, and the natural environment. Jains believe that harming nature, even unintentionally, leads to negative karma (Ranjan, 2014). This belief encourages minimal use of natural resources and a highly mindful lifestyle (Ray, 1984; Agarwal, 2018).

**Aparigraha (Non-Possessiveness)**: Jainism advocates limiting material possessions and desires, which aligns with modern sustainability and conservation principles. By practicing aparigraha, Jains reduce their ecological footprint and promote a more balanced relationship with the environment (Ray, 1984; Fergusson et al., 2018).

**Respect for All Life Forms**: Jains classify all forms of life (from single-sensed to five-sensed beings) and respect each type (Ray, 1984; Ranjan, 2014). Even microorganisms are considered to have life, which teaches deep reverence and careful interaction with the environment (Jain, 2010).

**Vegetarianism and Ecology**: Jainism promotes a strict vegetarian or even vegan diet, which significantly reduces environmental impact (Ranjan, 2014). This practice decreases the demand for resource-intensive animal agriculture, aligning with modern environmental education on sustainable food practices (Ray, 1984; Fergusson et al., 2018).

**Daily Practices as Environmental Ethics**: Jains follow rituals such as filtering water, avoiding night time eating to prevent harming insects and using natural resources sparingly (Ray, 1984). These practices instil

values of care, awareness, and ecological balance (Agarwal, 2018).

**Educational and Institutional Promotion**: Jain educational institutions often integrate ethical and environmental teachings (Ranjan, 2014). Religious discourses, scriptures, and community practices act as informal modes of environmental education (Jain, 2010).

**Scriptural Foundations**: Jain texts like the Tattvartha Sutra, Acharanga Sutra, and Dashavaikalika Sutra highlight respect for all living beings and non-exploitation of nature (Ray, 1984). These scriptures serve as foundational resources for understanding ecological ethics in Jainism (Jain, 2010; Ranjan, 2014). Environmental education in Jainism is not a separate discipline but an integral part of spiritual life (Ray, 1984; Ranjan, 2014). It teaches a deep ecological consciousness through non-violence, simplicity, and compassion-values that are increasingly relevant in addressing global environmental challenges today (Ranjan, 2014; Agarwal, 2018; Singh, 2022).

### **Environmental Education in Sikhism**

Environmental education in Sikhism is deeply embedded in its spiritual and ethical teachings (Singh, 2022). Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the 15th century, emphasizes harmony with nature, respect for all forms of life, and the interconnectedness of creation (Moony, 2018; Singh 2022). Sikhism teaches that the entire universe is created by one divine force, Waheguru. Nature is not separate from the Divine but a manifestation of it (Kaur, 2020). A quote from Guru Granth Sahib, says, "*Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all.*" (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 8). This line emphasizes reverence for the elements and fosters an ecological consciousness based on spiritual principles (Singh, 2022; Prill, 2023).

Sikhism encourages 'Living in Harmony with Nature'. It supports a lifestyle that is simple, sustainable, and in balance with nature (Kaur, 2020; Singh 2022). The concept of "Sehaj" (natural balance and moderation) promotes avoiding excess consumption and waste (Mooney, 2018). Environmental stewardship practiced through care, responsibility, sincerity and dedication is seen as part of 'Seva' (Selfless service). Caring for the environment is a duty, not a choice. This includes community efforts like cleaning rivers, planting trees, and maintaining cleanliness in Gurdwaras and surroundings (Kaur, 2020; Singh 2022). All beings are equal in the eyes of God. This principle extends to animals and the environment, fostering a respect for biodiversity and discouraging exploitation (Prill, 2015).

Members of the Sikh communities around the globe practice and support Environmentalism through their Langars (Community Kitchens) uses plant-based, simple meals, minimizing environmental impact (Mooney, 2018; Singh 2022). Many Gurdwaras are moving toward solar power, water conservation, and waste reduction as expressions of Sikh values for transforming them into sustainable and eco-friendly (Prill, 2015). Organizations like EcoSikh work globally to apply Sikh teachings to contemporary environmental issues, including Climate Change, deforestation, and water scarcity (Kaur, 2020; Singh 2022). In Sikhism, environmental education is not separate from religious instruction but a spiritual imperative. By teaching respect for nature, moderation, and selfless service, Sikhism offers a framework for ecological responsibility grounded in faith (Singh, 2022; Prill, 2023).

### **Environmental Education in Taoism**

Teaching Environmental education through Taoism offers a powerful, philosophical framework rooted in harmony with nature (Tucker, 1993; Yang et al., 2019; Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021). Taoism (or Daoism), an ancient Chinese philosophy and spiritual tradition, emphasizes living in accordance with the Tao (道)-the natural order or "Way" of the universe (Guo et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). Taoism can be integrated into environmental education in holistic manner (Tucker, 1993; Dessi, 2016; Yang et al., 2019; Wu and Lee, 2021).

The core Taoist concepts (Yang et al., 2019) supporting environmental awareness include:

**Wu Wei (无为):** Often translated as "non-action" or "effortless action," this principle promotes going with the natural flow rather than forcing change. In environmental terms, this encourages sustainable living and minimal disruption of ecosystems (Tucker, 1993; Dessi, 2016).

**Ziran (自然):** Translated as "naturalness" or "self-so," it promotes authenticity and harmony with the environment, valuing natural processes and organic development (Tucker, 1993; Jiang and Zhang, 2020).

**Yin and Yang (阴阳):** This concept of duality and balance teaches that nature functions through interdependent opposites. Environmental education can use this to show the balance required in ecosystems and the danger of tipping natural systems out of harmony (Guo et al., 2017).

Taoism is used traditionally as a pedagogical tool. Taoism views nature as a teacher (Guo et al., 2017; Wu and Lee, 2021). Students can engage in outdoor,

contemplative practices such as observation, journaling, or meditative walks to foster respect and connection to the natural world (Tucker, 1993; Lin et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019; Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021). Taoist classics like the Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzi are rich in parables and metaphors that can illustrate environmental principles (Guo et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). For example: "Man takes his law from Earth; Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Tao." (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 25). Taoist philosophy encourages simplicity, contentment, and reduction of material desire-values aligned with sustainable consumption and environmental ethics (Dessi, 2016; Lin et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019; Wu and Lee, 2021).

Practical applications of Taoist environmental education highlight upon the Taoism's reverence for life promotes intrinsic value in all beings, supporting conservation and biodiversity education (Jiang and Zhang, 2020). Taoist ideals of working with nature-not against it-align with sustainable agriculture, forest gardening, and permaculture (Tucker, 1993; Guo et al., 2017). Water is a central Taoist symbol. Lessons on water conservation, watershed health, and the hydrological cycle can be enriched with Taoist symbolism (Dessi, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). Taoism complements modern environmental science by adding spiritual and ethical dimensions (Tucker, 1993). While science explains how ecosystems function, Taoism asks us to consider why we should live in balance with them (Guo et al., 2017; Wu and Lee, 2021).

Different classroom based integration ideas focusing on Taoist faith can include guided meditations on the interconnection of life (Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021). Emphasis on reflective essays comparing Taoist texts with local environmental issues is quite relevant to modern aspects of environmental education (Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021). Organizing field trips to natural areas with Taoist-inspired mindfulness and encouraging creative arts by drawing Yin-Yang representations of ecosystem symbolizes environmental philosophy of classical and traditional Taoism integrated with modernism and practicality of the current global ethics (Tucker, 1993; Dessi, 2016; Guo et al., 2017).

### **Environmental Education in Laoism**

Environmental education in Laoism (or more accurately, Lao culture and traditional beliefs, which often include elements of Theravada Buddhism, animism, and spiritual practices) is deeply embedded in a worldview that sees humans as part of a larger, interconnected natural system (Nuyen, 2008; Wu and

Lee, 2021). Laoism traditionally views natural elements—forests, rivers, mountains—as inhabited by spirits (known as phi) (Lin et al., 2016). Respect for these spirits encourages protection of natural places, akin to environmental stewardship (Jiang and Zhang, 2020). For example, a sacred forest (pa xou) is not to be disturbed, hunted in, or cut down. This instills an early, informal environmental education rooted in fear and reverence (Lin et al., 2016; Guo et al., 2017; Wu and Lee, 2021).

As Laos is predominantly Theravada Buddhist, the principle of interdependence and karma informs behaviour toward the environment. Harming nature is seen as generating bad karma (Guo et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2016). Mindfulness and moderation discourage overexploitation of resources. Traditional Lao communities often rely on communal decision-making and taboos to manage natural resources. Seasonal harvesting and taboo zones promote sustainable use (Nuyen, 2008; Wu and Lee, 2021). Children learn these rules socially, embedding ecological knowledge from a young age (Lin et al., 2016; Wu and Lee, 2021). Environmental values are passed on through folktales, proverbs, and rituals. Stories often feature animals and forests as moral actors (Guo et al., 2017). These narratives subtly teach environmental ethics and caution against greed (Li et al., 2023). Today, formal environmental education programs in Laos are incorporating these traditional beliefs to foster a deeper sense of relevance and cultural continuity (Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021; Li et al., 2023).

### **Environmental Education in Confucianism**

Environmental education within Confucianism is not explicitly framed in the modern sense, but many of its core teachings align with environmental values (Tucker, 1993; Guo et al., 2017; Li et al., 2023). Confucianism emphasizes harmony between humans and nature. While not as ecologically focused as Daoism (Taoism), Confucian thought views the natural world as part of the moral and social order (Guo et al., 2017; Wu and Lee, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Humans are not above nature; but, part of its larger system. Confucius stressed ethical behaviour, which includes being conscientious and responsible (Nuyen, 2008; Li et al., 2023). This sense of moral duty can extend to how one treats the environment—suggesting a responsibility to care for the natural world as part of virtuous living. In Confucianism, “Tian” (Heaven) represents the natural order and moral authority. Acting in accordance with Heaven means respecting the natural world, as disrupting it would be a form of moral failure (Tucker, 1993; Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021; Li et al., 2023).

Confucianism teaches the Cultivation of Virtue (Ren and Li) (Tucker, 1993; Nuyen, 2008). Ren (benevolence) encourages compassion, which can extend to all forms of life. Li (ritual/propriety) emphasizes respectful behaviour, which can be interpreted as including how humans interact with the environment (Tucker, 1993; Nuyen, 2008; Guo et al., 2017). Traditional Confucian communities emphasized moderation, frugality, and living in balance—all values compatible with sustainable environmental practices (Tucker, 1993; Nuyen, 2008; Guo et al., 2017; Wu and Lee, 2021). The ethics of environmental education deeply rooted in Confucian values can teach: respect for the natural world as part of moral development, responsibility to maintain balance and harmony, and ethical reflection on consumerism, waste, and human impact on ecosystems (Nuyen, 2008; Jiang and Zhang, 2020; Wu and Lee, 2021).

### **Environmental Education in Shintoism**

Environmental education, as perceived in Shintoism, is deeply rooted in the religion's reverence for nature (Rots, 2017). While Shintoism does not have a structured system of environmental education like modern curricula, its spiritual and cultural worldview naturally encourages environmental awareness, respect, and sustainability. In Shinto belief, kami (divine spirits) inhabit natural elements—trees, mountains, rivers, rocks. This spiritual view promotes a deep respect for the environment, teaching that harming nature is akin to offending the divine (Reitam, 2017).

Shinto shrines are often located in natural settings and are meant to be in harmony with their surroundings. Sacred groves (chinju no mori) surrounding shrines act as preserved ecosystems and offer practical models of biodiversity conservation. Water is used in purification rites (Misogi), reflecting its spiritual importance and emphasizing the need to protect clean natural water sources. Seasonal festivals (Matsuri) often mark agricultural cycles, harvests, or honour natural phenomena (Reitam, 2017). These rituals reinforce environmental rhythms and human dependency on nature, fostering ecological awareness (Rots, 2017).

Shinto emphasizes living in harmony with nature, not dominating it. This ethos aligns with sustainable living and ecological balance. It supports non-anthropocentric values, where humans are part of nature, not above it (Rots, 2017). Through oral traditions, shrine practices, and community rituals, values of environmental stewardship are passed down generations, acting as informal but powerful

environmental education. Shintoism offers a spiritually infused form of environmental education, emphasizing respect, harmony, and reverence for nature. While not formalized, these values contribute significantly to ecological consciousness and can complement modern environmental education frameworks (Reitam, 2017).

### Conclusion

Religious faiths and beliefs significantly shape our perception of environmental education and awareness by influencing values, attitudes, and behaviours toward nature and ecological responsibility (Gardner, 2010; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2019). Many religions emphasize stewardship-the belief that humans have a divine responsibility to care for the Earth (Hitzhusen, 2006). For example: Christianity often teaches that humans are caretakers of God's creation (Genesis 2:15). Islam emphasizes humans as khalifa (stewards) of the Earth, responsible for protecting it. Judaism includes principles of tikkun olam (repairing the world), encouraging environmental responsibility (Gardner, 2010). Hinduism and Buddhism promote the interconnectedness of all life and a respect for nature, often seeing divinity in natural elements (Hitzhusen, 2006; Gardner, 2010).

Religious teachings often in still moral frameworks that encourage environmentally responsible behaviour, such as: avoiding wastefulness, promoting simplicity and moderation, and respecting all forms of life (Basak, 2024). These ethics can enhance environmental awareness and inform curricula or activism grounded in moral duty (Parker, 2017; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2019). Faith-based communities can be powerful platforms for environmental education (Hitzhusen, 2006; Parker 2017). Religious leaders and organizations often promote eco-friendly practices, host environmental awareness events, and integrate environmental themes into sermons and teachings (Basak, 2024). On the other hand, some religious interpretations might downplay environmental concerns, especially if they emphasize human dominion over nature or prioritize the afterlife over earthly matters (Fergusson et al., 2018). This can lead to indifference or scepticism toward environmental education.

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