Online Religious Discourse on Environmental Issue in Kashmir: A Case of the Achabal Spring Desiccation

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This paper examines the online religious discourse surrounding the environmental crisis of the dessication of the Achabal Spring in Kashmir. Using the netnographic method, it analyzes

videos posted by public religious figures in response to a viral video of a local woman lamenting the spring & its decline. The study explores how these figures framed the issue within

Islamic theological frameworks, identifying a spectrum of anthropocentric and theocentric perspectives. While some leaders emphasized human culpability and ignorance from the Islamic duty of stewardship (khalifah), others interpreted the event as a divine sign or punishment. This research argues that the Achabal incident became a significant digital moment where religious authority was leveraged to shape public understanding of an ecological disaster. The findings reveal the complex and sometimes contradictory role of faith-based rhetoric in environmental advocacy, highlighting its potential to both motivate conservation efforts and foster passive acceptance. The study concludes that religious discourse is a critical, yet underexplored, dimension of environmental communication in Muslim-majority regions like Kashmir.

Keywords:

Theology, Environmental crisis, Achabal spring, Religious discourse.

Introduction

The intersection of religion and ecology has emerged as a critical field of study, particularly in regions where faith deeply informs cultural identity and worldviews. In Kashmir, a territory

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renowned for its fragile and breathtaking Himalayan ecosystems, environmental degradation poses an existential threat. The rapid desiccation of springs, glaciers, and water bodies—the very lifeblood of the region—signals a profound ecological crisis[i]. However, public discourse on these issues often transcends purely scientific or political language, entering the realm of faith and spirituality. This paper investigates this phenomenon through a specific case study: the online discursive response from Muslim religious figures to the alarming drying of the historic Achabal Spring in Anantnag, South Kashmir. The study focuses on how these figures engaged with a viral social media video featuring a local woman emotionally mourning the spring's decline, and analyzes the differences in their theological interpretations and ethical prescriptions.

The contemporary environmental context in Kashmir is one of acute precarity. Scholars like Rashid and Naseem argue that the region is experiencing the tangible impacts of climate change compounded by "unregulated urban expansion, tourism pressure, and a deficit in effective environmental governance."[ii] Water bodies like Dal Lake are shrinking, and numerous perennial springs, central to local water security and cultural heritage, are reporting drastically reduced discharges or complete disappearance.[iii] The Achabal Spring, a Mughal-era garden spring revered for its beauty and historical significance, became a potent symbol of this broader crisis when videos of its dried-up were circulated online in mid-February, 2025.

The viral video of a distraught Kashmiri woman singing a traditional lament for the spring served as a cultural catalyst. Her raw emotion transcended linguistic barriers, making the abstract concept of "environmental loss" viscerally real for a vast online audience. This moment created a discursive opening, a juncture where scientific explanation alone seemed insufficient to many. Public religious leaders, imams and scholars quickly began to comment on the event through videos on Facebook and YouTube.

This study is situated within broader theoretical debates on religion and the environment. The Achabal incident provides a real-world context to see how these competing perspectives, anthropocentric dominion versus theocentric stewardship, are articulated and negotiated by religious authorities for a public grappling with an immediate ecological trauma.

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it contributes to the under-researched area of digital religion and environmental communication in South Asia, specifically within the contested territory of Kashmir. Second, it moves beyond textual analysis of religious doctrines

to examine how these doctrines are dynamically deployed in response to a specific socio-ecological event. It captures religion in practice, not just in theory. Third, it illuminates the powerful role social media plays in shaping environmental narratives, demonstrating how religious authority is now constructed and contested in digital spaces.

The next section outlines major man-environment perspectives, following which the contemporary environmental challenges in Kashmir with special focus on spring depletion has been discussed. This section also details on the historical assessment, and cultural-socio-economic relevance of the Achabal spring. The next section describes the methodology, followed by the description and analysis of the religious discourse. Finally, the last section concludes the paper.

Major perspectives on Man-Environment relationship

The relationship of man with nature shapes various environmental perspectives. This relationship with environment is determined by how we perceive and treat it in our day-to-day life. The perspectives of people regarding environment and their relationship with nature vary as the human attitudes are shaped by different worldviews. The ecological crisis which the world is facing today can't be solved by mere scientific and technological interventions, as the underlying cause of such crisis lies within the attitudes and worldviews of man towards nature. Some major worldviews which shape and determine the man's relationship with nature include:

a. Anthropocentrism:

It is the belief that human beings are primary or most significant entity of the universe. Etymologically, anthropocentrism originates from the Greek words "ánthrōpos" (human) and "kéntron" (center), signifying the "human centered" approach. In philosophical form, it is the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value, and all other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans.[iv] The roots of our ecological crisis are axiomatic; that is, they lie in our beliefs and value structures, which shape our relationship with nature, with each other, and in the lifestyles we lead.

The anthropocentric worldview elevates human beings to 'Lords' of creation with sovereignty over the earth. Here, God created the earth, plants and animals, heavenly bodies and the

cosmos explicitly for benefit of humankind and the purpose of this all was to serve man' s needs.[v]

However, this approach is critiqued for environmental and climate crisis as it promotes individualism, Cartesian deism, industrialism and colonialism. According to Syed Hossein Nasr, this approach has paved the way for humanity's mastery, pillaging and exploitation of the resources of the natural world.

b. Theocentricism:

This perspective of environment offers a clear and constructive idea about man's relationship with nature. This term is derived from a Greek word "Theos" which means 'God' or 'God's', and an English word "centre"; that means environmentalism centered on God. According to this, faith, man and Nature are separate creations of God. Theocentrism defines man and Nature in relation to the God that created them both. Among many other things, theocentrism recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human life, limits human dominion over creation by recognizing that human authority is delegated by God, requires balance in relations between human and non-human life.

Theocentric approach recognizes God as the principal stakeholder in human relations with the Earth and all its inhabitants. This philosophy also promotes a proper balance of the various interests involved. When viewed holistically, Quran teaches that humans, as God's vicegerents have to care for the rest of creation. God doesnot unduly restrict His stewards while they serve, He permits people to use and enjoy creation responsibly as they care for it, but they are not authorized to abuse and spoil His creation in the process.

Therefore, to provoke more responsible environmental action among common people, mainstream environmental messaging from legislators, activists and preachers should strategically incorporate theocentric appeals and pulpits should intentionally emphasize the theocentric concepts.[vi]

c. Eco-centricism:

In this approach there is no division of the world into the living and non living, and everything is connected to everything else, living in symbiosis. This stance considers humans as integral part of nature, and proposes humans to ask deep questions to themselves regarding the

environment. It is the perspective which places intrinsic value on all living organisms and their natural environment, regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human beings. Eco-centrism (from Greek: oikos, "house" and kentron, "center") is a term used by environmental philosophers and ecologists to mean a nature-centred approach, as opposed to anthropocentric approach.[vii] In the perspective of environmental ethics, an eco-centric view holds that earth's ecology and ecosystems such as its atmosphere, water, land and all life forms have intrinsic value; meaning they should be protected and valued even if they cannot be used by humans as resources.[viii]

Contemporary Environmental Issues in Kashmir with Special focus on Achabal Spring Depletion.

The Kashmir Valley has for centuries been shaped by a finely balanced hydrological regime of glacier and snowmelt, seasonal precipitation, and abundant groundwater springs. In recent decades, anthropogenic pressures and climatic shifts have begun to erode that balance. The contemporary environmental problems facing the Valley are multiple and interacting: shrinking and contamination of natural springs; glacier retreat and reduced snowpack; river flow decline and altered seasonality; groundwater depletion and contamination; deforestation and land-use change; expanding and often poorly planned urbanisation and infrastructure (including hydropower and road projects); mining and sedimentation; increased incidence of forest fires and associated habitat loss; and impacts on biodiversity and agriculture. Each of these issues has distinct causes and social consequences, but together they generate a compound risk to water security, food production, cultural landscapes and heritage in the Valley. As such, contemporary environmental challenges in the Kashmir Valley manifest across multiple interrelated dimensions. However, Spring depletion has become one of the most prominent and difficult environmental issue in Kashmir contemporarily. Springs supply 80–90% of rural drinking and irrigation water; an estimated 50% of Himalayan springs—including many in Kashmir—are in decline due to reduced recharge and channel blockage. Natural springs have historically provided potable water and irrigation to thousands of villages across the Valley. Recent surveys and journalistic investigations indicate that more than half of Kashmir's freshwater springs have shrunk or gone dry over the last two decades, with many local communities losing perennial access to spring water.

Springs (locally called *Naag*) are the hydrological lifelines of Kashmir's mountain villages and plain-edge orchards. Historically these groundwater springs fed reservoir tanks, irrigation

channels and the nascent urban water supplies of pre-modern settlements. Because Kashmir's topography collects orographic precipitation, springs acted as natural capture points around which human settlements and sacred sites were clustered.

In Kashmir's pre-Islamic and early medieval historical accounts, springs and associated temple sites were woven into Hindu religious geography. Classical local lore and texts such as the *Nilmata Purana* mention springs such as '*Achapal'* (Achabal), indicating that these sites were recognized and venerated long before the Mughals made them prominent. The *Nilamata Purana* also recounts the divine origin of the river Vitasta (Jhelum)—born when Parvati drained Lake Satisāra with Shiva's trident—linking springs to creative cosmic forces.[ix]

With the advent of Islam in the 14th century, Sufi saints, such as in the Rishi order, fostered syncretic reverence for springs as sources of *barakah* (blessing) and healing, embedding both Hindu and Muslim ethos into Kashmiri cultural identity.[x] The Muslim cultural connection to springs in Kashmir is both devotional and practical. With the arrival and flourishing of Sufism in Kashmir from medieval centuries onward, many springs came to be associated with shrines, saintly narratives and the Mughal garden aesthetics. The Mughal gardens, designed to orchestrate water flow, fountains and reflective pools, integrated existing springs into consciously designed leisure gardens (e.g., Achabal, Verinag, Nishat, Shalimar), making springs an aesthetic and social centrepiece for seasonal retreats.[xi] In popular practice, springs near Sufi shrines and markets have ritual value, and are the sites of everyday acts of care: washing, drinking and agricultural watering.

Across religious difference, springs historically served as communal gathering points such as for women fetching water, ritual processions and festivals tied to seasonal flows. Thus, both Hindu and Muslim ethos overlap in perceiving springs as liminal spaces: sources of life, sites of ritual observance and anchors of community memory.

Achabal Spring: History, Origin and Cultural Significance

Situated in Anantnag district, the Achabal Spring is one of the Valley's best-known historic springs. It was earlier known as *"Akkshavala"*, first mentioned by Kalhana (12th century) as the village of Aksha and its *naag* ("spring") fed from the Brengi river. In 1620 A.D., Empress Nūr Jahān established the Mughal *char-bagh* "Achabal Gardens" to harness the spring's flow, later enhanced by Jahanara and post-decay, by Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh. The Mughal

architects incorporated the perennial spring into cascades, pools and fountain works, combining utilitarian supply with a formal, symmetrical garden layout that resonated both aesthetically and spiritually with the Mughal taste for water-engineered landscapes.

Achabal sits within a dense spring-scape in southern Anantnag and adjacent districts. Within a 25 km radius of Achabal lie other celebrated springs, notably Verinag which is the river Jhelum's principal source, re-enshrined by Jahangir in an octagonal tank (1620 A.D.), and Kokernag, famed for its multi-channelled "hen-claw" spring and botanical gardens.

The Achabal spring is a groundwater spring that emerges from the Karewa and associated lithologies at this foothill site. In turn, it feeds a channel system that was developed by the Mughals as a short cascade, pool and outflow stream that serves not just as garden ornamentation but also caters to the water needs of adjacent settlements. Studies show that the Achabal is among the springs with significant but variable discharge rates. Local accounts also describe the spring as a source feeding multiple water-supply schemes and village tank, supplying pure water to roughly twenty surrounding villages in normal years. Culturally, the Achabal spring carries layered meanings. It has been the focus of local festivals, everyday rites and the tourist gaze that has long associated Kashmir's Mughal gardens with the Valley's identity. Oral histories recount that the spring water was regarded as *shifa'* (healing) for ailments. The Muslim cultural ethos thus reinforced the perception of Achabal as both life-giving and spiritually endowed. Socio-economically, Achabal Spring underpins both agrarian livelihoods and heritage tourism. Its waters irrigate rice fields, orchards and vegetable plots across ten villages. Economically, the spring supports local horticulture markets, cottage-industry, trout farms and Mughal-garden tourism, drawing thousands of visitors annually.[xii]

The British colonial officers and travel writers frequently mentioned the gardens in accounts of Kashmir, noting the "remarkable constancy" of the spring's flow.[xiii] The site remained part of the touristic itinerary during the twentieth century, with state-led garden maintenance ensuring its visibility as a heritage asset. Currently, the Achabal Garden, along with the spring, is managed by state horticulture and tourism departments, and is a well-known symbol of Kashmir's cultural identity in promotional materials.

However, in mid-February 2025 a viral video and multiple press reports documented the temporary cessation of the main spring discharge, showing dry cascade beds and exposed pond sediments at the Achabal Garden. The images stirred public concern because the spring had

not been seen visibly dry in living memory for many local residents. Meteorologists and hydrologists attributed the event to a severe dry spell combined with longer-term warming and hydrological stress.[xiv] However, scientific and policy researches situate such episodic drying within broader trends. More broadly, field reports note that over the last 20 years, many Valley springs have shrunk or become contaminated. This pattern is linked to both climatic causes and anthropogenic factors such as deforestation, mining and unregulated extraction.

The drying episode holds immediate and medium-term consequences. Immediately, villages dependent on Achabal's spring reported water shortages and reliance on tanker supply, with knock-on effects for domestic use, livestock and small-scale irrigation.[xv] Medium-term, repeated occurrences can affect horticultural productivity, tourism and conservation of a Mughal heritage site whose design and cultural meaning depend on water display and movement. Moreover, public perceptions of drying up of sacred sites triggered broader cultural distress, as seen in the viral imagery of local residents visibly distressed before the spring's partial replenishment.

Methodology

This study employed the Netnography method, which adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of digital communities and online discourses. Netnography was chosen as it allows for the examination of naturally occurring cultural expressions and narratives in online spaces, particularly those produced by influential religious figures whose voices shape both virtual and offline communities in Kashmir.

The data were collected from two widely used social media platforms in the region, Facebook and YouTube, which serve as key sites of religious communication and public engagement. The dataset consisted of publicly accessible videos uploaded by religious scholars and orators who hold significant followings both online and offline. To capture a diversity of perspectives, scholars representing the three major religious orientations of Kashmir viz. Deobandi, Barelvi, and Ahl-e-Hadith were purposively selected. It examines the content of their messages, their rhetorical strategies, and the theological frameworks they employ. In order to maintain temporal relevance and ensure that the data reflected immediate responses to the incident under study, only videos posted in February 2025, the month directly following the episode, were included in the analysis.

All selected videos were transcribed in full to create a textual corpus for analysis. A systematic coding process was then applied, guided by principles of qualitative content analysis. This involved the development of a coding scheme that allowed for the identification and classification of recurring themes, frames, and discursive patterns within the data. The coding process was iterative, with categories refined to ensure both conceptual clarity and analytical rigor.

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the sociopolitical context of Kashmir, ethical considerations were carefully observed. Only publicly available content was included, and no interaction with the scholars or their audiences was undertaken during the data collection process, maintaining a passive netnographic stance.

The Online Religious Discourse

In February 2025, a video was widely shared on social media after the drying up of the Achabal spring for the first time in history. The video under study captures a deeply symbolic moment in Kashmir's historic Achabal Gardens. In the footage, an elderly Kashmiri woman, her voice quivering with emotion, publicly mourns the drying of the spring, and implores divine assistance for its restoration. Her lament represents not merely personal grief but a shared sense of loss felt across the community, whose social, economic, and spiritual wellbeing has been intricately connected to the spring's flow. This significance is heightened by the fact that over 15 villages and 13 water supply schemes depend on the water from the spring. The woman's impassioned words embody how environmental degradation in Kashmir is a lived reality that directly impacts livelihoods, heritage, and identity.

In one widely circulated segment, the woman pleads: *"O majestic Spring, why have you stopped giving us water? What have we done to you? … Come back to life… Oh Allah, let the water gush forth once more…"* Her statement is imbued with both cultural reverence for nature and spiritual supplication, reflecting the community's deep-rooted historical and emotional ties to the spring.

Positioning this video at the core of the study allows for an exploration of the role played by religious orators delivering Friday sermons, community elders and local influencers in raising awareness and mobilizing action on environmental crises. The desiccation of Achabal Spring provides a focused case study to assess how such public figures respond to the emotionally

charged appeals of elderly women, and how these moments can catalyze broader environmental consciousness in the Kashmir Valley.

This incident catalyzed a series of religious discourses that reveal the complex intersections of theology, ecology, gender and authority in contemporary Islam in Kashmir. What might otherwise have been interpreted as an environmental crisis became, in these discourses, a deeply spiritual and communal moment in which ecological decline was framed as divine commentary on human practice. The sermons under analysis, delivered in a mosque setting by local scholars demonstrate not only divergent theological orientations but also competing visions of Kashmiri identity, spirituality and reform.

The first strand of discourse emerges from Ahl-e-Hadith orientation, which interprets the woman's act through the lens of *tawḥīd*. Here, the tone is one of balance: the woman is revered as a "crown of our heads" and approached with compassion, yet her practice of supplicating at the spring is delegitimized as a deviation from true monotheism. The preacher's rhetorical strategy combines reverence with correction, framing her action as the result not of personal fault but of communal negligence in religious education. In this view, the exclusion of women from mosques and scriptural learning has left them vulnerable to misguided practices, and the remedy lies in involving them in the study of Qur'an and Hadith. The sermon thus entwines doctrinal rigidity with a gendered reformist agenda, proposing women's religious uplift as a means to correct households and by extension, the entire nation. The Achabal Spring itself becomes a theological battleground, its drying presented not in ecological but in spiritual terms—a divine warning against *shirk* (polytheism) and misplaced devotion. Ecological crisis is thus re-theologized as evidence of spiritual corruption, and the incident is magnified into a collective indictment of Kashmiri Islam's deviation from *tawḥīd*.

The second sermon, although issued from the Deobandi tradition, however, has strong Salafi strand. This sermon presents a comprehensive critique centred on the exclusive right of Allah to worship (*tawḥīd*), condemning prevalent shrine-based practices such as the invocation of saints, circumambulation of tomb and offerings as polytheism. The sermon portrays forceful and emphatic appeal and criticism that is grounded in the scriptural proofs from the Qurʾān and Hadīth. This sermon associated the drying of Achabal spring as a divine response to *shirk* and immorality in Kashmiri society. It delegitimizes shrine culture, local folk practices and alleged public immorality, while reasserting the Salafi commitment to *tawḥīd*, scriptural Islam and ritual piety. The speech functions simultaneously as a critique of syncretic Kashmiri

religiosity and a call for communal reform through repentance, *salāh* (prayers) and Qur'anic orthodoxy.

In contrast, the third sermon comes from the Barelvi orientation. It defends the woman and situates her prayer within Kashmir's saintly heritage. Explaining the rightfulness of the woman, while condemning the strong criticism of the old lady's appeal, the preacher attributes the sudden return of water to the spring to her tearful supplication, framed as evidence of divine responsiveness to sincere faith. This narrative reaffirms Kashmiri traditions of revering the Prophet and the *awliya Allah* (saints), and addressing the spring in reverence. The preacher argues that to mock the woman is to mock the region's spiritual legacy. He not only condemns social media ridicule as *fitna* (trial) but also calls for administrative measures against those who insult the elderly, thus extending the crisis from the spiritual to the political domain. The rhetorical strategy combines ethos, pathos and logos—grounding legitimacy in saints, evoking sympathy for the woman's lament and reasoning that ridicule undermines communal harmony. The juxtaposition of these responses highlights tensions between disciplinary and empathetic modes of religious authority, while also underscoring the growing influence of digital publics in reshaping communal religious discourse.

Another cluster of responses emerges from religious interventions each of which re-interprets the incident through distinct theological and cultural frameworks. Another known preacher of the Barelvi thought intervenes in this debate in a polemical manner, targeting those who branded the woman's act as *shirk*. Drawing on textual precedents, such as the Prophet's address to Mount Uhud and Umar ibn al-Khattab's letter to the Nile, he argues that speaking to natural entities does not undermine divine sovereignty, but instead reflects a cosmology in which creation is alive and reflective through the divine agency. The preacher positions the woman's "simple faith" as authentic and vibrant, in contrast to the sterile legalism of some scholars.

On the other hand, the fourth public preacher, takes a nostalgic and mystical approach, lamenting the erosion of Kashmir's devotional culture under the weight of modernity and *fatwa*-driven religiosity. For him, the woman's prayer resonates with the memory of mothers who once rose before dawn to supplicate for their communities, embodying the Kashmiri spirituality, now in decline. The preacher interprets environmental decline as a symbol of spiritual depletion. His stance privileges emotion, memory and symbol over juristic categories. The preacher emphasises the social harmony and goodwill, the erosion of which has led to the

depletion of the natural resources, thus resonating the theological view which attributes environmental problems to unethical and widespread sectarian chaos in the contemporary Kashmiri society.

The last sermon of the Deobandi orientation, however, offers a pragmatic and orthodox framework. He situates the drought within prophetic teaching that neglect of charity leads to withheld rain, prescribing a systematic response: payment of *zakat* (almsgiving), voluntary charity, repentance, and *salāt al-istisqā* (prayer for rain). His discourse shifts focus from polemic or nostalgia to prescriptive action, embedding ecological crisis within a moral economy governed by scriptural injunctions.

Taken together, these sermons illuminate the diversity of religious discourse in contemporary Kashmir. They reveal how the same incident is framed in a variety of interpretations such as evidence of *shirk*, as a symbol of saintly heritage, as authentic faith wrongly maligned, as nostalgia for lost spirituality, lack of social solidarity or as a call to scriptural remedies. While their doctrinal orientations diverge, all share a common assumption that spiritual realities play role in environmental concerns, are inseparable from them and that religious practice has a direct effect on the natural endowments. In each sermon, the Achabal Spring becomes more than a natural resource — it is transformed into a site of contestation where anxieties about faith, authority, gender, modernity and ecology converge.

Analysis and Discussion

The diverse religious discourses surrounding the drying of the Achabal Spring present a complex tapestry of environmental interpretations. The incident became a digital pulpit from which various Islamic orientations projected their distinct worldviews. This helps in effectively mapping the ecological crisis onto a spectrum of anthropocentric and theocentric approaches discussed in second section of this paper.

The responses from the Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi scholars represent a potent fusion of a modified anthropocentric culpability within a rigid theocentric framework. Their interpretation is fundamentally theocentric, as it posits God as the primary actor; the drying is not a hydrological incident but a divine act—a ‘‘divine warning’’. However, the cause of this divine punishment is squarely placed on human actions, aligning with an anthropocentric focus on human agency. Yet, this is not an anthropocentrism of resource exploitation critiqued by

scholars like Syed Hossein Nasr, but one of theological error. The root cause is identified as human spiritual failure in the form of *shirk* (polytheism) and moral decay, rather than concrete environmental mismanagement like deforestation or over-exploitation of resources. This echoes the argument that the ecological crisis stems from human "beliefs and value structures", but narrows it exclusively to ritual and moral practice. The prescribed solution, therefore, is not conservation, but spiritual and communal reform through repentance and correct worship, embedding the ecological event within a moral prism where nature's condition is a direct reflection of human piety.

In stark contrast, the Barelvi sermons propound a worldview that synthesizes Ecocentric sensibility with a theocentric foundation. These scholars defend the woman's personification of the spring, drawing on textual precedents to argue that nature is not merely a resource but a creation alive with spiritual significance. This aligns with an Ecocentric principle that attributes intrinsic value to non-human entities. The spring is a repository of memory and a symbol of Kashmir's saintly heritage, deserving of reverence in its own right. However, this Ecocentric view is thoroughly validated by a theocentric worldview: the creation has value and agency because it is God's creation. The preacher who attributes the return of water to the woman's "tearful supplication" frames it as evidence of divine responsiveness, intertwining the fate of the natural world with the sincerity of human faith. This perspective promotes environmental care as a form of devotional practice, resonating with the theocentric idea of the human being as steward (*khalifa*) who must care for God's creation.

The pragmatic Deobandi sermon and the mystical preacher's nostalgic approach offer further nuances. The former provides a systematic theocentric response, prescribing religious remedies like *zakāt* (almsgiving) and *salāt al-Istisqā* (prayer for rain) based on prophetic teachings, thus framing the drought within a covenant between God and humanity. The latter laments a lost spirituality where nature and devotion were intertwined, interpreting environmental decline as a symbol of spiritual depletion and a breakdown of social harmony. Both, in their own ways, affirm the core assumption unifying all the sermons that belief, spirituality, morality and environmental realities are inseparable.

Ultimately, the Achabal incident demonstrates that in the Kashmiri context, an environmental crisis is rarely just environmental. It becomes a profound symbolic event where anxieties about faith, authority, modernity and identity are negotiated. The scientific explanations of climate change and hydrological stress, while noted in press reports, were largely absent from these

religious discourses. Instead, religious leaders leveraged their authority to provide meaning, translating a complex ecological trauma into familiar theological narratives. This highlights both the potential and the limitation of faith-based environmental communication: it can mobilize deep-seated cultural and emotional responses, but can also divert focus from material, scientific and political causes, sometimes fostering passive acceptance or internal communal critique instead of direct conservation action.

Conclusion

This study has examined how the alarming desiccation of the historic Achabal Spring in Kashmir catalyzed a vibrant online religious discourse, revealing how ecological crises are interpreted through theological lenses. As the analysis shows, the incident became a significant digital moment where religious authority was deployed to shape public understanding, with leaders from the Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandi and Barelvi orientations projecting competing visions of Islamic environmental ethics and belief.

The findings reveal a complex interplay between the major man-environment perspectives. The event was framed predominantly through a theocentric worldview, where God is the ultimate actor in the natural world. However, this Theocentrism bifurcated into two primary responses: one viewing the spring's drying as a divine punishment for human error (*shirk*), while the other saw it as a call to revive a spiritual connection with a creation endowed with intrinsic value.

This research concludes that religious discourse is a critical, yet underexplored, dimension of environmental communication. Religious leaders act as key interpreters, translating scientific phenomena into the language of theology and morality. This process can powerfully motivate community concern and prescribe ethical action grounded in local values. However, the sermon under study were primarily focused on the theological aspect of the woman's appeal to the spring, which led to focusing more on the belief while compromising on the effective advocacy for environment ethics and preservation in Kashmir. As such, in a way, this reduced the multifaceted environmental problems to issues of personal piety, potentially overlooking the urgent need for action-based and conservation-oriented solutions. The Achabal Spring crisis, therefore, underscores the necessity of engaging with religious narratives as a central part of any effective and culturally resonant environmental advocacy in Kashmir, while also advocating for a dialogue that integrates rather than excludes empirical ecological knowledge.

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