



The Role of Ethnoecology in Environmental Protection

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of ethnoecology in environmental protection and to explore how traditional ecological values can contribute to modern sustainability efforts in the context of New Uzbekistan. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method through an extensive literature review of historical, cultural, and religious sources such as Avesta, the Qur'an, Hadiths, and classical works of Central Asian scholars. The research reveals that ethnoecology – integrating traditional knowledge and ecological awareness – serves as a moral and cultural foundation for promoting environmental protection. The findings highlight that the ecological consciousness deeply rooted in ancient Uzbek traditions demonstrates a sustainable human–nature relationship that aligns with contemporary ecological principles. It concludes that incorporating ethnoecological values into modern environmental policies can enhance ecological culture, strengthen public responsibility toward nature, and support sustainable development.*

Keywords: *Uzbeks, ethnology, ecology, ethnoecology, nature protection, values, land, air, water, fire, Avesta, Koran, Hadith, great scholars, green space.*

Introduction

In the era of global environmental challenges, the issue of protecting nature and ensuring ecological balance has become one of the most pressing priorities for humanity. The relationship between humans and nature, which dates back to the earliest stages of civilization, remains a determining factor in the sustainable development of modern societies. In this context, ethnoecology – a field that studies the interaction between ethnic culture and the natural environment – plays a crucial role.

Ethnoecology emphasizes the traditional knowledge, customs, and values developed by various peoples over centuries to live in harmony with nature. These practices represent not only a cultural heritage but also a valuable foundation for addressing contemporary ecological problems. For nations like Uzbekistan, with a rich historical and cultural background, the study of ethnoecological traditions provides insight into how ancestral wisdom can contribute to modern environmental protection strategies.

Therefore, exploring the role of ethnoecology in environmental protection is vital for promoting ecological awareness, strengthening the moral responsibility of individuals toward nature, and integrating national traditions into global sustainability efforts. This study aims to highlight the significance of ethnoecological values in fostering a responsible and harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment in the context of the New Uzbekistan.

Methodology

From the early days of independence, environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources have become one of the priority directions of the state policy of Uzbekistan. This urgent issue has also found its reflection in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which serves as the fundamental law of our country. As stated in Article 52 of the new edition of the Constitution (April 30, 2023): "Citizens are obliged to protect the environment and treat nature with care." [1, p. 25].

Since the very beginning of human development, humanity — an integral part and the crown of Mother Nature — has been in close connection with the surrounding environment, and this relationship has played a vital role in human evolution. Therefore, since ancient times, people have paid great attention to the protection of nature and the environment. The ancestors of the inhabitants of Turan, one of the cradles of world civilization, also created their own unique system of ethnoecological values related to the preservation and reverence of nature.

Ethnology occupies a significant place among the social sciences and was formed as a distinct discipline in the mid-19th century, though ethnological knowledge originated in ancient times. The term ethnology derives from the Greek words *ethnos* (people) and *logos* (science), meaning "the science of peoples." Along with this term, ethnography (from *ethnos* – people, *graphos* – description) is also used. Since the 1990s, both terms have been widely applied. In Western countries, this field is often referred to as cultural anthropology or social anthropology [2;3, pp. 9–10].

The main object of this science — *ethnos* (nations and peoples) — participates actively in economic, social, political, and cultural processes throughout its development. The various aspects of an *ethnos*'s activity are also studied by other disciplines that explore culture and society. Ethnology continuously evolves through interaction with related sciences, one of which is ecology. These two sciences intersect in addressing specific issues, among which the protection of the environment and nature is of particular importance.

Result and Discussion

At present, a new interdisciplinary direction — ethnoecology — is emerging at the intersection of ethnology and ecology. From our point of view, ethnoecology encompasses the centuries-old traditions and customs of our ancestors in protecting nature and has deep historical roots. Concepts such as "ecological culture," "ecological conscience," "ecological disaster," "ecological threat," "ecological party," and "ecological movement" are widely used today. Without ecological culture, one cannot speak of culture at all. In our nation, there is even a saying: "Protecting nature means protecting the homeland." The ecological problem has now become one of the major global challenges, and solving it serves the interests of all nations. The current stage and future of civilization largely depend on the wise resolution of this issue.

The elements of nature — earth, air, water, and fire (the Sun) — have been revered in Central Asia since ancient times and are valued in all religious systems of our ancestors, from Zoroastrianism to Islam (sacred sources such as Avesta, Qur'an, and Hadith). To study

and popularize the pre-Islamic traditions of rational and harmonious use of nature by the peoples of the region, historical sources are of great importance [4, pp. 86–89].

Keeping the environment clean, maintaining household order, and protecting land and water resources were carried out in harmony with both religious and secular values. Even in the early stages of family and social relations, religious norms shaped by Sharia law played an important role.

The Uzbek people have a rich ecological and cultural heritage. In particular, our great scholars — Musa Khwarizmi, Abu Rayhan Beruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Abu Nasr Farabi, Amir Temur, Mirzo Ulugbek, and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur — discussed in detail the relationship between nature, living organisms, and their environment [5, pp. 246–249].

Mother Nature provides us with everything necessary for life — clean air, pure water, food, and clothing. Through labor, humans transform nature and use it for their purposes. By understanding natural laws, humans create a “second nature.” Therefore, every individual must treat nature with great love and care, preserving it intact for future generations.

In the New Uzbekistan, it is extremely important to study and describe the rich scientific and cultural heritage of our ancestors in protecting and preserving nature, and to convey these values to our people, especially the younger generation.

Conclusion

In summary, the study of ethnoecology reveals that traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices accumulated over centuries play a vital role in promoting sustainable environmental protection. The harmony between humans and nature, deeply rooted in the spiritual and moral worldview of our ancestors, demonstrates that ecological awareness is not a modern invention but an integral part of cultural heritage.

For Uzbekistan, where environmental issues are closely linked to social, cultural, and economic development, the integration of ethnoecological principles into modern ecological policies can provide effective and culturally relevant solutions. Ancient traditions of nature protection — reflected in customs, folk wisdom, and religious values — serve as moral and educational foundations for developing ecological culture among the younger generation.

Thus, ethnoecology not only enriches scientific understanding of the interaction between culture and environment but also contributes to the formation of ecological consciousness in society. By preserving and applying the ethnoecological heritage of our ancestors, it is possible to ensure a balanced coexistence between humanity and nature, which is essential for the sustainable future of the New Uzbekistan.

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