

## Conservation of Environment and Role of Religion: Insights from Qur'an and Prophetic Model

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### Abstract

Islam being a divine message propagates in its originality to make your environment neat and clean by all means. Allah/Creator has designed this universe in its best moulds and certainly is desirous that human beings have to make it more beautiful and more meaningful. It is obvious that a human being is a creation of Allah and takes birth in its beautiful planet which has already been created by Almighty with its wonderful biosphere. The Quran says: *From it (earth) We created you and into it We shall send you back and from it We will raise you a second time* (20:55). Prophet (SAW) also says: *“Preserve the earth because it is your mother”*.

One should understand the importance of surrounding environment wherein he lives. This concept needs expansion by all means so that wherever humans live on the surface of globe can take care of it by planting more trees, by making greenery more attractive, more beautiful so that pure oxygen will be inhaled it can help us in the development of mind and body. It has been stressed by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that *“cleanliness is next Godliness”*. Islam thoroughly advocated planting of trees and encouraged people to protect them to the extent that planting of trees is considered as an act of worship. The Holy Prophet said: *“Unless you are compelled, do not cut down a tree”* Likewise, Islam has equally stressed the animal rights as Prophet (SAW) said: *“Whoever kills a sparrow without any reason will be questioned by God on the Day of Judgment”*. A very eminent scholar, Allama Mohammad TaqiJa'fari concludes his discussion about animals in this way: *“Consideration of whole sources of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) leads to the conclusion that animals must not be killed unless there is a legal permission (by God) like benefiting from them or being safe from their harm.*

There are adequate reasons for prohibiting hunting animals for fun and one can argue from these reasons for prohibition of killing animals without having a permitting cause”.

This inculcates a concept of transforming already designed environment into a clean one. It is often being preached to clean your house day in and day out so that others may get a lesson. It is as such within the roots of Islamic ideology to have a look up of your environment wherein you are living, growing, eating, and cultivating a family structure. Within the dimensions of Qur’anic philosophy humans have been given a clean environment and it is their first and foremost duty not to pollute it by any means. Environment is a broader term, which includes everything not only to keep it free from pollution but to have a holistic view of the space given to him. In the backdrop of these introductory remarks present paper is an attempt to give an objective analysis of environmental ethics in the light of Qur’an and Sunnah. It is in this context the present paper has been drafted.

**Key words :** Environment, Conservation, Religion, Quran, Prophetic Model.

“**T**he environment is Allah’s creation. The creation of this earth and all its natural resources is a sign of His wisdom, mercy, power and His other attributes and therefore serves to develop human awareness and understanding of this creator” (13:2-4, 21:79). “The seven heavens and the earth, and all human beings therein, declare His glory; this is not a thing but celebrates His praise, and yet ye understand not how they declare His Glory!” (17:44).

In Islam, the relationship between humankind and the environment is part of social existence, an existence based on the fact that everything on earth worships the same God. Nature and environment have always played an important part in the lives of devout Muslims. Muslims understand that Allah has not created all this for nothing. In fact, Muslims

have been commanded to find the wonderful signs of Allah around them so that they will only increase in their awe of Allah. Allah says “O people! Worship your Lord, who hath created you and those before you, that ye may have the chance to learn righteousness; who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth)” (2:21-22). The significance of the environment in Islam, as a vessel for multitudinous religious events, is manifested in different forms and patterns of behavior, not only by human beings but also by other elements of nature. However, Islam does not perceive the environment or its elements as a God, but rather as ontological symbols upon which people’s minds can be focused to understand the creator. The role of

the environment as such is therefore derived from what it represents and not from what it is. Axiomatic meanings for human existence are often concluded from the environment. Human beings are given value, for instance, from the fact that they are made from the clay of the earth, an often unclean substance that discomforts when it dirties clothes and utensils. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: “the earth has been created for me as a *masjid* and as a means of purification” (Bukhari). The Hadith states that Muhammad (SAW) laid emphasis on the sacred nature of earth or soil, not only as a pure entity but also as a purifying agent. This reverence towards soil is also demonstrated in the ritual of *Tayyammum* ‘Dry Soil’ which permits the use of dust in the performance of ritual purification before prayer when water is not available. Yet this substance is a basic element for the continuity of life. Earth is considered to be the womb for all life, for from it all life forms gain nourishment. It is one womb that produces different types of offspring, different fruits and vegetables, resonating the power of its Maker: “And in the earth are tracts (Diverse though) neighboring, and gardens of vines and fields sown with corn, and palm trees growing out of single roots or otherwise: watered with the same water” (13:4). For the preparation of the manuscript relevant literature has been consulted<sup>1-17</sup>.

*Environmental ethics: An Islamic perspective :*

Islam’s pays special attention to human beings, as they are the ones who both bring about development and are the first to benefit from its returns. Human beings are part of this universe; made of earth clay; full of sophisticated spirituality that makes them

similar to angels. These two elements - body and spirit - are integrated into one holistic creature. One of the fundamental principles of sustainable development is to care and preserve the environment. There are many verses in Qur’an wherein stress has been made on reverence and respect for ecosystem such as thunder, mountains, rocks, and trees etc., and it makes us realize and sense the importance of natural phenomenon and that they are blessings and signs to indicate the Mercy, Presence and Might of (SWT). This realization should drive humans to preserve nature, care for its wellbeing, and work on developing it. The Islamic perspective on environment ethics reflects a positive image about Islam and how it embraces every single matter the humans face on earth. The Islamic attitude towards environment and natural resource conservation is not only based on prohibition of over-exploitation but also on sustainable development. The Holy Quran says:”It is He who has appointed you viceroys in the earth ... that He may try you in what He has given you.” (6:165).

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) urges mankind to keep the environment clean and to avoid all acts of pollution. In a Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra: “Steer clear of the three transgressions: defecating in reservoirs, on the road, or in the shade. Anyone who pollutes water, air, or any place that serves people hurt others. In this sense, everything that is harmful to people should be avoided and removed. The Prophet’s warning to the people despite their simple Bedouin lifestyle which lacked any civilizational basics in this field was to show that such acts would deprive other people from benefits.

Islam encourages the conservation of the environment because it is the only resource of life. Therefore, people have to protect the environment. Environmental resources come in different forms such as water, plants, animals, birds, places, air, and sea, among others. Utilizing these resources is the right of all creatures. The right to benefit from the environment is linked to being accountable to it, as people are the only rational creatures on earth. Allah has made water the basis and origin of life. Allah says: "We made from water every living thing..." (21:30). Plants, animals, and man all depend on water for their existence and for the continuation of their lives. God has said: "Verily... in the rain that God sends down from heaven, thereby giving life to the earth after its death..." (2:164). "It is He Who sends down water from the sky; and thereby We have brought forth the plants of every kind..." (6:99). There is no doubt that conservation of this vital element is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life in its various forms, plant, animal, and human. It is also obligatory, for, in Islamic law, whatever is indispensable to fulfill the imperative obligation of preserving life is therefore itself obligatory. Owing to the importance of water as the basis of life, God has made its use the common right of all living beings and all human beings. All are entitled to use it without monopoly, usurpation, despoilment, wastage, or abuse. God commanded with regard to the people of Thamud and their camel, "And tell them that the water shall be shared between them..." (54:28) and the Prophet said: "Muslims are to share in these three things: water, pasture, and fire." Abu Hurayra narrated: The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "Let not one of you relieve him in stagnant water and then wash himself with that water".

The Quran proclaims that it is Allah who sends water from the sky, and therewith we bring forth buds of every kind. We bring forth the green blade from which we bring the thick clustered grain, and from the date-palm, from the pollen thereof, spring pendant bunches, and garden of grapes, and the olive and pomegranate". Dr. Amina Muhammad Nasir in a seminar while presenting his paper in Alexandria "Islam and protection of environment" says that Islam links faith and belief to cleanliness. Some of the pillars of Islam, such as prayer (*Salat*) and the pilgrimage (Hajj) can only be performed in a state of purity and washing in pure, clean water, free of any contamination. This article of faith and others teach us to protect sources of water from pollution and to keep them clean. Islam's concern with science and scientists is the clearest evidence of Islam's encouragement of progress in scientific research into all environmental resources, including water purification and desalination and the scientific means involved so that water may be fit for man's consumption - Man, whom Allah made His vicegerent, whom He has honoured on land and at sea, to whom He has given everything necessary for life so that his journey may continue until Allah, to Whom be ascribed all Perfection and Majesty, inherits the earth and everyone thereon". Thus there is a great bond between man and his environment, whether at the individual, the collective or the state levels. Cleanliness, as in washing and ritual ablution either with clean water or sand, is of vital importance and a requisite of Islamic belief and faith without which worship is invalid. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said "cleanliness is half of faith". In another tradition, Muhammad (SAW) said "Be sure to keep your teeth clean, for cleanliness invites to faith and faith will lead you to paradise"

(Muslim and Tirmidhi).

There is no denying the importance of plants and animals as living resources of enormous benefit, without which neither man nor other species could survive. Allah has not made any of His creatures worthless: every single form of life is the product of a special and intricate development by Allah, and each warrants special respect. Plants constitute the basic source of sustenance for animals on earth. Allah says: "Then let man consider his nourishment: that We pour down the rain in showers, and We split the earth in fragments, and therein make the grain to grow, and vines and herbs, and olives and palms, and gardens of dense foliage, and fruits and fodder - provision for you and your cattle." (80:24-32). Prophet (SAW) was equally vehement against those who cut down trees for no good reason or caused harm to the natural environment. Abdallah b. Halehi narrated: "The Messenger of Allah, (SAW) said: 'Whosoever cuts down a tree will have his head put into the Fires of Hell by God'. In addition to this, Muhammad (SAW) encouraging people to plant trees and cultivate: "Every Muslim who plants a tree or plants a crop from which birds, people or animals eat shall have a reward for a beneficent act" (Bukhari, Muslim and Tirmidhi). It is incumbent on every Muslim to contribute his/her share in improving greenery. Muslims should be active in growing more trees for the benefit of all people. Even during battle, Muslims are required to avoid cutting of trees that are useful to people. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) instructed the believer that any Muslim who plants a crop that feeds another person, animal or bird, will receive a reward in paradise. This aspect of preservation relates to which as we all know has a key role in

preserving the health of the environment. Trees filter out pollutants and emit oxygen in the atmosphere. It consumes carbon monoxide and provides for humans beautiful scenery, cooling shade, and various fruits. In another Hadith IbnJarir narrated that Omara Ibn Khozaimaibn Thabit said: I hear Umar Ibn al Khattab saying to my father: "why would not you plant trees in your land? My father answered: I am an old man and I may die tomorrow. Umar said: I urge you to do it. Then I saw Umar himself planting trees with his hands along with my father" (Al Jami Al Sayuti, 32-337).

Islam also lays emphasis on the importance of animals is admitted with reference to human need and environment. Regarding the protection of animals Allah Almighty says: "And the cattle hath He created, whence ye have warm clothing and uses, and whereof ye eat; And wherein is beauty for you, when ye bring them home, and when ye take them out to pasture. And they bear your loads for you unto a land ye could not reach save with great trouble to yourselves. Lo! Your Lord is Full of Pity, Merciful. And horses and mules and asses (hath He created) that ye may ride them, and for ornament. And He createth that which ye know not." (16:5-8). The Messenger of Allah has severely discouraged beating animals without justification. He said: "Whosoever killed a sparrow unjustly, it will complain before Allah saying O! Allah such and such person had killed me unjustly and he had not killed me for any benefit". The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: "Do not aim at and kill a thing having life uselessly. According to the commentators of the Qur'an . . . animals all live a life, individual and social, like members of a human commune. In other words, they are like communities in their own right and not in

relation to human species or its values. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said that he who is kind and merciful towards animals, Allah will be kind and merciful towards him. The essence of Islamic teachings on “Animal Rights” is that depriving animals of their fair share in the resources of nature is so serious a sin in the eyes of Allah that it is punishable by punitive retribution: The Quran describes how the people of Thamud demanded that the Prophet Saleh (A.S) show them some sign to prove he was a prophet of Allah. The people of Thamud promised to give water but latter killed the camel and tribe was annihilated (7:73).

R.A. Nicholson impressed by the Muslim treatment with the animals and he in his book "*The Mystic of Islam*" mentioned the following story of nineteenth century mystic Bayazid Bistami, who purchased some cardamom seed at Hamadhan, and before departing put into his gabardine a small quantity which was left over. On reaching Bistam and recollecting what he had done, he took out the seed and found out that it contained a number of ants. Saying, “I have carried the poor creatures away from their home” he immediately set off and journeyed back to Hamadan distance of several hundred miles.

From this we can easily say that Islam permits that no living creature is tormented or abused. Whether man or beast, all living creatures have rights. Those who violate their rights or disregard them will be punished in the hereafter by God if it not possible for them to be punished by the authorities here. Allah’s Messenger expressed this in the following way: “It is a fact that in the next life we will render their rights to those whom they are due. The hornless sheep even will receive its right

by way of retaliation from a horned sheep that butted it.

*Islam and balance in environmental system:*

There is no doubt in it that Allah (SWT) has created the universe in balanced manner. There are many verses wherein Allah has mentioned balanced environmental system. The Holy Qur’an says: “And We have given unto you livelihoods therein, and unto those for whom ye provide not.” “And there is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And We send it not down save in appointed measure” (15:19-21). Further Allah states: “Who hath created seven heavens in harmony? Thou (Muhammad) canst see no fault in the Beneficent One’s creation; then look again: Canst thou see any rifts?” “Then look again and yet again, thy sight will return unto thee weakened and made dim.” (67: 3-4). The divine balance in nature (the natural balance) offers conservation of biodiversity through time without facing dangers of extinction. Rational use by human kind is the way to keep and conserve for generations, this can be developed as sustainable use of natural resources. Each natural cycle is linked and balanced in harmony with other cycles and interacts with living organisms in complementary way. Allah has singled out humankind and taught it clear expression – the capacity to reason. All creation has an order and a purpose and is in a state of dynamic balance. If the sun, the moon, the stars did not bow themselves, *i.e.*, serve the purpose of their design, it would be impossible for life to function on earth. This is another way of saying that the natural order works because it is in submission to the Creator. It is Muslim in the original, primordial sense.

Moreover, there are some general Islamic concepts which serve to reinforce these observations. One is the belief that everything within our possession and which we conveniently call our property is not only provided by God but ultimately belong to Him. On this belief, what we have is merely placed in our trust, and must be preserved and delivered back to God in the best manner possible. The following Quranic verse emphasizes the point: *"Believe in Allah and His messenger, and spend of that whereof He hath made you trustees; and such of you as believe and spend (aright), theirs will be a great reward."* (7:7). the imperative towards charity here is premised on the belief that we are mere trustees of the wealth in our possession. Muslims will naturally extend this belief with regards to all the natural resources within their ambit.

Related to this idea of trust is the concept of vicegerency. In the Quran, God says: *"Then We appointed you viceroys in the earth after them, that We might see how ye behave"* (10:14). The behavior of those who cause corruption on earth is well noted: *"And when he turneth away (from thee) his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle; and Allah loveth not mischief"* (2:205). According to the Quran, God made well everything he has created: *"Who made all things good which He created"* (32:7). And we are commanded to keep it that way: *"Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order"* (7:56).

*Concluding remarks :*

It can be argued from the preceding

discussion that Islam had a special concern with the environment, it is the Divine Law which demands that man protect the environment and Allah, to whom be ascribed all, will punish all who neglect its provisions. For, above all, the environment, with all its various signs of Allah was made by the Creator who created all things in Perfect Measure. Therefore the protection, conservation, and development of the environment and natural resources is a mandatory religious duty to which every Muslim should be committed. This commitment emanates from the individual's responsibility before God to protect himself and his community of the soil, air, and water. Failing to follow the Quranic injunctions, we have, of course, upset the ecological balance. It is up to us to set it right again. This will require great effort, and courageous personal change.

We need to do our best to restore and preserve the balance in nature; to take up our responsibility as representatives of God on earth and hence as custodians, stewards, and trustees in whose trust God has placed the resources we enjoy. We need to maintain the ecosystems that harbor the dazzling array of life forms God has created, including animals, birds, insects, and plants. But the required personal changes are sometimes simple and manageable.

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