

Ecology and sustainability issues in religious: An analysis

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Abstract

Science, technology and sustainability article try to tell the situation that happen in today routine life. This article explains on how does Islamic perspective in handle and solving the issue arises in environment and ecology. The article starts by giving definition on the world view from the glass of Islamic and western doctrine and understanding on environment. Next the article explains on why does human has the responsibility on governs the nature and should not make no harm upon the environment. Environmental ethic that the western civilization practices reflects the action that the western people do when dealing with the environment. Islamic perspective seems to be the best alternative in dealing and helping the nature to heal from the corruption that it faced. In conclusion the article hopes that, Islamic approach for environment issue method can be one of the choice in future in order to settle or drafting the policy.

Keywords: Environment, Ethics, Ecology, Islamic Perspective.

1. Introduction

Global development is increasingly rampant for the mere betterment of human living. There are two pathways in which this development is executed which are through the Western and Islamic perspectives. The West achieves development through the separation of values and material. The western pattern of development starts by creating and maximising production and demand. Meanwhile, Islamic development gives the definition of value cooperation between intrinsic and extrinsic Islamic development which can be measured. This started during the golden age and lasted for more than 700 years. During this age, there was no record of any environmental crisis that occurred. During the golden age, Islamic civilization established its glory by the pillar that Islamic religion gave. This created a more natural relation between human and environment as humans are not impartial to nature. Allah gave humans the responsibility to not only develop the environment but to make no harm to it. The Western civilization has not thrived nearly as long as the Islamic civilization, yet the extent of damages which resulted from the West's actions way supersede that weight of time. Hence, it will probably need to take more than a million years for earth to recover from it.

Environmental crisis is a pressing issue in the present day and it has to date happen mainly due to nations' urge to claim the status of developed country. This is apparent even in the Islamic world today as one sees blatant signs of the environmental crisis in nearly every country from the air pollution in Cairo and Tehran to the erosions of the hills of Yemen to the deforestation of many areas of Malaysia. Environmental problems seem to be present everywhere especially in urban centres and also in many parts of the countryside to a degree that one cannot distinguish the Islamic world from most other areas of the globe as far as acute environmental problems are concerned. Superficially, the Islamic view of nature could not have been different from that

of the modern West which first thrust the environment crisis upon the whole of mankind. However truthfully, the Islamic view of the environment is very different from what has been prevalent in the West during the past few centuries. If that view has now become partly hidden, it is because 3 of the onslaught of Western civilization since the 18th century and the destruction of much of the Islamic civilization, due to both external and internal factors, although the Islamic religion itself has continued to flourish and remains strong. Some of the quotes depict the Islamic view of the relations between humans and nature, as cited from the Hadith and Qur'an.

*"The world is green and beautiful and God has appointed you as His stewards over it.
He sees how you acquit yourselves."* (Muslim)

"Whoever plants a tree and looks after it with care, until it matures and becomes productive, will be rewarded in the Hereafter." (Bukhari and Muslim)

"If anyone plants a tree or sows a field and men, beasts, or birds eat from it, he should consider it as a charity on his part." (Imam Ahmad, Musnad)

"My Lord is He who spread out for you the earth like a carpet; and made paths therein for you, and sent down water from the clouds. Then, thereby, we have produced diverse pairs of plants, each distinct from the other." (Qur'an 20:53)

2. The Ecology and Environmental Ethics

Ecology by western definition is the scientific study of the relationships that living organisms have with each other and with their abiotic environment. Ecosystems on the other hand are composed of organisms (plants, animals and microbes), the communities they make up, and the non-living components of their environment (air, water and mineral soil), dynamically

interacting as a system. The ecosystems sustain life-supporting functions and produce natural capital like biomass production (food, fuel, fiber and medicine), the regulation of climate, global biogeochemical cycles, water filtration, soil formation, erosion control, flood protection and many other natural features of scientific, historical, economic, or intrinsic value. Biodiversity, which refers to the varieties of species, genes, and ecosystems, enhances certain ecosystem services.

On the contrary, the Islamic perspective sees the whole realm of nature as the revelation of the will of God. It is evident from the following verses of the Holy Qur'an that the divine will is manifested in the creation of heavens and of the earth, the alternation of day and night, and in the variety of plants and animals. "Sees thou not that to Allah bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth - the sun, the moon, the stars; the hills, the trees, the animals; and a great number among mankind? " (Quran 22:18) There is intrinsic goodness, beauty, harmony, and orderliness in the creation. Everything in it including the sun, the moon, the stars have been created for the benefit of man. The Universe was created with a purpose, as the requisite environment in which man might fulfill the divine trust which he had accepted. Islam also teaches humans that all creatures of God, whether it is the tiny ant or the huge lion, serve a certain purpose in the larger scheme of God's world: "There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, or a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you (Quran 6:38) In simpler terms, this shows the role of humans as the appointed steward of the environment created by God.

3. Man: Trustee and Vicegerent

One of the Islamic beliefs is that everything within human possession and which they conveniently call their property is not only provided by God but ultimately belongs to Him. On this belief, human possessions are merely entrusted to them, and must be preserved and delivered back to God in the best manner possible, as cited in the following verse of the Qur'an.

"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."(Quran 57:7)

The importance here lies in the belief that humans are mere trustees of the wealth in their possession. Thus, Muslims will naturally extend this belief with regards to all the natural resources within their domain. This idea of trust is also known as the concept of vicegerency. In the Qur'an, God says:

"Then we appointed you viceroys in the earth after them, that we might see how ye behave" (Quran 10:14)

The behavior of those who cause corruption on earth is well noted:

"And when he turned away (from thee) his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle; and Allah loved not mischief" (Quran 2:205).

According to the Qur'an, God made well everything he has created and we are commanded to keep it that way:

"Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order" (Qur'an 7:56).

Besides that, Muslims also believe that there are three important criteria that govern human actions which are aql, ability to learn and intuition. God created human beings with these abilities to enable them to make right and just judgments in their decision making which will eventually be reflected in the consequences of their actions whether good or bad. Taking into context of our study, this ability can help human to administrate the environment with justice with guides from Qur'an and Hadith.

From here, it is evident that human actions have a volatile effect on the environment and just like everything else; every course of action has its consequence. Hence, extra efforts must be taken to safeguard the environment from harm as environmental crises are merely a starting point for greater global predicament. An unhealthy environment will lead to numerous negative impacts to humankind. Some examples, such as deforestation, will lead to insufficiency in fresh water supply and subsequently global heat imbalance leading to greenhouse effects for instance. The clearing of trees in the forest will also cause top soil erosion on the earth's surface. This top soil is rich with nutrient that vegetation or crop need to bear fruit, thus such damage would only result in food security issues, just to name a few.

4. Environmental Issues

In view of the environmental crisis highlighted due to the actions of mankind in this era of globalization, several occurring environmental issues will be discussed. It has been mentioned earlier that these environmental problems arise due to the rapid industrialization of the Western civilization since their early years and this has loomed ever since plaguing even the Islamic worlds which were role models of a balance relation between human and nature. Hence, we will look into these environmental issues in detail with regards to the Islamic teachings. The discussion on the issues will be deliberated at the discussion part.

4.1. Water Pollution

Water is an essence of life. Plants, animals and man all depend on water for their existence and for the continuation of their lives. The Muslims believe that God has made water the basis and origin of life. God says in the Qur'an "We made from water every living thing," (Qur'an 15:19) and also "Verily...in the rain that God sends down from heaven, thereby giving life to the earth after its death..." (Qur'an 24:41) God has called on man to appreciate the value of water an essential element of life. In addition, water has another vital function in terms of socio-religious which is the purification of the body and clothing from all dirt, impurities and defilement so that man may encounter God clean and pure. God has said in the Glorious Qur'an "And he caused rain to descend on you from heaven to cleanse you herewith." (Muslim; Abu Sa'id al-Khudri)

Water is also a determinant between the rich and poor. There is more water in the Northern hemisphere of globe than there is in the Southern Hemisphere. The range of use varies from up to 20,000 liters per capita a year in the United States of America to less than 500 liters in some developing countries.

However, the waters of almost all the rivers in the world, especially those in developing countries, have become polluted now. Hence, most rural communities are exposed to unsafe water. Since many pollutants have no distinctive color or smell,

it is not easy for an average person to judge from the look of water whether or not it is safe. In light of these facts, plus the fact that our earth is the only planet in the universe known so far to contain water, it is not surprising that the Qur'an laid so much emphasis on the importance of water as seen in the following verses:

"God created every animal out of water: of them there are some that creep on their bellies; others that walk on two legs; and others on four."
(Qur'an 24:45)

"It is he who has given the free flow to two kinds of water – the one thirst-quenching and sweet and the other salt and bitter. Yet, He had set an insuperable barrier between their intrinsic qualities which cannot be changed. It is He who created man out of the very water and then established his relationship of kin and wedlock."
(Qur'an 25:53, 54)

4.2. Deforestation

Trees cover a third of our earth. They regulate climate, protect water supplies, and nurture millions of species of animals. They soak up carbon monoxide and other gases and, therefore, maintain a natural balance in the world's temperature and climate. Half of our medicines are derived from plants. By destroying the rainforest, we will never know what useful plants we may have lost. Forests are also being cut for timber or to provide extra land for cultivation. Large areas are being cleared to be turned into pastures for cattle in order to export their meat to meet the demand of other countries. It is only the trunks of trees that can be used as timber while their twigs and debris are left to rot, releasing carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere. This situation became so desperate that the United Nations Environment Program, working closely with other United Nations agencies and international environmental organizations, called for 8 billion dollars to be spent on the Tropical Forestry Plan during the five years ending 1991.

The Islamic legislation on the preservation of trees and plants at the time laid down some fourteen centuries ago, covers not only forests but also wildlife. According to these laws, certain area, called *harimor hima*, are set aside and development or cultivation is prohibited. This code of ecological legislation was based on numerous verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. According to Tabari, an exegesis of Qur'an, the holy book cites "Do not cut down trees and do not kill animals except for food (in the enemy territory)." In later years, Muslim law-makers based the Islamic legal system on such decrees and formulated similar laws covering the conservation of forests, over-grazing, water resources, animal rights etc. They even formulated laws hundreds of years ago in checking over-population in cities, a problem which has now become a major cause of ecological disaster throughout the world. For example in Africa alone, the number of people coming to live in cities is growing at the rate of 4 percent a year. It is estimated that between 1980 and 2000, 200 million more people will have moved into cities.

4.3. Animal Extinction

Animals are a vital living resource of enormous benefit, without which neither man nor other species could survive. God has not made any of His creatures worthless: every single form of life is the product of a special and intricate development by God, and warrants special respect. As a living

genetic resource, each species and variety is unique and irreplaceable. Animals provide sustenance for plants, for one another, and for man. Their dung and their bodies enrich the soil and the seas. They contribute to the atmosphere by respiration and by their movements and migrations contribute to the distribution of plants. They provide food for one another and provide mankind with leather, hair and wool, medicines and perfumes and means of conveyance, as well as meat, milk and honey.

Hence, animals are accorded special regard in Islam for their highly developed senses and perceptions and their social interrelationships for God consider them living societies exactly like mankind. God has declared in the Glorious Qur'an, "There is not an animal on the earth, nor any being that wings its flight, but is people like unto you." (Qur'an 6:38) The absolute destruction of any species of animal or plant by man can in no way be justified; nor should any be harvested at a rate in excess of its natural regeneration. This applies to hunting and fishing, and all other utilization of living resources. It is essential that the genetic diversity of living beings be preserved, both for their own sake and for the good of mankind and all other creatures.

It is not only in the name of human need for food that animals are killed, but they are also killed needlessly for trinkets and fancy goods. The carriage of animals such as elephants, rhinos, whales, crocodiles, seals, and numerous others has led to the near extinction of many such species. Millions of animals are tortured and killed under the pretext of scientific experiment, although most of these are experiments for commercial enterprises for example, the supply of cosmetics for which alternatives are readily available.

Over the years, man has forgotten their responsibilities as God's steward on earth. Man rear animals in barbaric ways supposedly to improve the quality of their meat or encourage animals to fight with each other or with humans in the name of sport. Bullfights, the chase, badger baiting and falconry are considered legitimate sports. Animals are generally held in contempt by humans, largely because they are considered to be dumb. Humans behave towards them as though they had no feelings, and often degrade them or treat them badly. The Qur'an and Hadith remind us that they are communities like the human community, loved and created equally by God as mention in the Qur'an,

"There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you..." (Qur'an 6:38) and Hadith, "All creatures are like a family (ayal) of God: and He loves the most those who are the most beneficent to His family."
(Shu'ab al-Imam)

and are as much a symbol of God's power of creation as human beings are. Hence, it is mention in the following verse of the Hadith that,

"A good deed done to a beast is as good as doing good to a human being; while an act of cruelty to a beast is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being." (Mishkat al-Masabih)

5. Discussion

Science advancement in the world nowadays does not only play major role in the ecology but also impact directly and indirectly Muslims across the globe. Some of the advancement

give benefit to the human being but give negative impact to the ecology. As a new philosophy of understanding the environment in the West emerges, the introduction of the idea of environmental ethics seems to be the answer for the issues arising concerning the environment. This idea draws deeply onto the understanding of nature and creation as every culture in this world has its own worldviews or paradigm. According to Nicholas (2000) [2] there are eco-centric and human-centric categories on handling and understanding this environmental ethic. The Ecocentric School of account believes that nature or environment does not have value economically just because it benefits human but more than that. It believes that the value lay on the intrinsic element of the natural. On the other hand, the human-centric school of account believe that the environment is valued if it gives benefits to the human being. Though, both school of thoughts keep human impartial from the environment. Even though eco-centric give more emphasis on the environment but still it does not see human being a part of the whole ecosystem. These schools of account still make human being masters of the environment and nature as an instrument or an entity valued only by its contribution to human interest.

Environmental ethics seem to be the best solution for the Westerners, but seem to provide no solution for the occurring problems. This school of thoughts differs from the Islamic teaching as there are no separations between human and nature in Islam as both are creations of God. Islam instils the trust to admin the environment as human have the capability to bow down to God and understand the status of stewed. Understanding both approach western and Islamic, it is fair to say that the Islamic approach has a more holistic approach in tackling the issues regarding to environment. The world should give chance to the Muslim to execute their teaching and evaluate the outcome.

In handling the issues, the Muslims should strengthen the understanding of environment to the world and show how Islamic approach is more significant and more environmental friendly. The Fatwa Council meet to address these issues and come up with protocol or check list so that the Muslim in this world can help to preserve the natural ecosystem. This council is crucial as most of the discovery in this world come from the western doctrine understanding of science and environment.

It is the time where Muslim should play a more active role as much as reactive role. Muslim must enquire the needed knowledge to handle these issues. For example, Malaysia as a country where Islam is the official religion have to take part on making a bold movement in combating the environmental issues using Islamic teaching and protocol. The move that the country of Malaysia make and used will be the role model of the Islamic approach. Others will evaluate the actions of Malaysians and follow suit. This practise will then be more effectively implemented.

Let's look at the current situation in Malaysia, the Klang River is been polluted many years due to the action by the community who live around the area make their life suffer as the polluted river bring many other undesired attribute. Flash flood and shortage of clean water just to name a few of the phenomenon that we observe in this new decades.

In Islam, the context of sustainability rest upon the moulding of a human being. Sustainability should also start from the awareness of the environment and its distress. Almost all major religions enshrine a few scriptural statements on the

conservation of Nature. There is no religion in this world that allows the destruction of environment. On the basis of Allah's guidance in Qur'an, Muslim legal scholars have defined the ultimate objective of the Shari'ah as the universal common good of all created beings, both in this life and in the life after death. Working for the good of all creation is the only way that one can truly serve Allah. The following sayings of the Prophet Muhammad express the profound religious and ethical value of bringing new life to the land: *"Whoever brings dead land to life, for him is a reward in it, and whatever any creature seeking food eats of it shall be reckoned as charity from him."* (Mishkat al-Masabih) and *"There is no Muslim who plants a tree or sows a field, and a human, bird or animal eats from it, but it shall be reckoned as charity from him."* (Mishkat al-Masabih)

It is recorded that the Prophet Muhammad prohibited the cutting of any tree in the desert which provided valuable shade or sustenance either for humans or animals, and that he established protected zones around Makkah, al Madinah and al Ta'if, within which he forbade the cutting of native trees and the hunting of wildlife. The attitude of the Shari'ah towards the use and development of the earth's resources was accurately summed up by the Prophet's follower and cousin, 'Ali ibnAbi-Talib, who said to a man who had dug canals and reclaimed abandoned land: *"Partake of it with joy, so long as you are a benefactor, not a corruptor, a cultivator, not a destroyer."* (Yahyaibn Adam)

The rights to benefit from nature are connected to obligation and maintenance or preservation of the resource. The essential legitimate rule set up by the Prophet Muhammad is that *"The benefit of a thing is in return for the liability attached to it."* [Sahih Al-Bukhari,]. A lot of environmental destruction is caused by people's lack of knowledge of what their Creator demands of them. People today need to be forced to understand that the conservation of the natural environment is a religious responsibility required by the almighty. Allah has stated: *"And do good as Allah has been good to you. And do not seek to cause corruption in the earth. Allah does not love the corrupters"*. [Holy Qur'an -Al Qasas 28:77].

As Masri (1992) wisely notes "the ecological problems we are facing today arise from the fact that humans have started using very scarce resources wastefully and in such a way that we are not giving nature a chance to reproduce the things we are taking out of it". Islam maintains that God is the absolute creator and sustainer of the universe and the resources within, all elements of nature and the associated resource. Allah said *"nay, we let them and their forebears enjoy the good things of life, until they outlive their prosperity. Can they not see that we visit the land under their control and gradually curtail its boundaries all around them? Is it, then, they who will prevail?"* [Holy Quran-Anbiyaa 21:44]. Islam advocates, as Llewellyn (1984, as cited in Akhtar 1996:59) notes, that *"environmental disruption of any kind must be avoided for two reasons. First, it is an ethical command of Islamic jurisprudence and law and second, it is essential for protecting the public interest and universal common good of all mankind"*.

The concerns today being portrayed are not new readings or interpretations of Islam but a muchneeded expression and acknowledgement of the connection involving mankind and nature, and accountability to the almighty, which have always been found within Islam (El-Naggar (2007). As most of the people become industrial, people have become rapidly

disconnected from the natural community. Numerous Muslims these days adore Mother Nature but do not understand much regarding it. Practically they need to be made conscious of what is going on, however most importantly they need to rediscover the teachings that had been contained in their religious beliefs, or way of life, right from the start originating mainly in the key source for Muslims, the Qur'an. This relationship is based on teachings within the Qur'an scripture, conserved precisely both in oral, memorized, type as well as in book form for more than fourteen centuries, such as in the following verse: *"It is He who has made you His Guardians of the Earth. He has raised you in ranks, some above others, that He may try you in the gifts He has given you. For your Lord is quick in punishment, yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."* [Holy Quran – An 'am 6:165]. This verse and others make it obvious to Muslims that the world and all its benefits, whatever part each individual is given power over, is an evaluation for them, a trust from the almighty, and their obligation is to look after it, as stated by God's laws and regulations. They're going to be held accountable to God for this, and disciplined or compensated depending on how good they fulfilled their responsibilities as Guardians or trustees serving God. When they make errors, nevertheless, they need merely reverse to God, seeking forgiveness and trying to make amends, and they will be mercifully pardoned by him and permitted another opportunity to demonstrate their trustworthiness.

6. Conclusion

The Holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad are the basic sources which may lead us to develop an Islamic perspective regarding the ecological crisis. Islamic teachings are fundamental in re-establishing the basic principles of environmental conservation, especially in the Islamic world today. God has created for us the earth in which we dwell and resources that will sustain us and has appointed us 'khalifahs' or vicegerents to take up the responsibility of guarding nature and to protect it from harm. Hence, religion is a crucial binder of humankind to their conscience and awareness of their every action towards nature. Without with, humans will never know when to stop or continue to be blinded by only greed and selfishness, bearing in mind only the aspects of which benefits them as opposed to the destruction to the very environment which provides for us and sustains us.

7. References

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