

# The Islamic Worldview on Nature and Environment

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*In the contemporary world, special attention has been given globally to environmental issues by stakeholders at different levels. This has resulted in the formation of various policies and the establishment of agents in this direction. The aim of this study is to examine the Islamic perspective on nature and environment. The methodology used in this research paper was a narrative analytical method in which references were made to the verses of Qur'an, the Hadiths and other related works on the topic to reach the research outcome after a thorough analysis. Meanwhile, after a conceptual analysis of the related terms; Quranic worldview on nature/environment and the Islamic approaches to an environmental conservation were critically analyzed based on the available data. The outcome of our research shows that Islam since its inception fourteen centuries ago had given special attention to the environmental hygiene and in the same way special attention is given to the physical hygiene. In conclusion, if the human being and the Muslims in particular could abide by the Islamic recommendations on nature and environment, the world would remain a better place to live for all and sundry.*

In the contemporary world, the nature or the natural environment is being affected on daily basis by the activities of man and this has resulted in the emergence of numerous sicknesses; a lower life expectancy rate and unhealthy lifestyles. At present, the common environmental challenges facing the humanity across the globe include pollution, ozone layer depletion, global warming, acid rain, desertification, deforestation, natural resource depletion, overpopulation, and waste disposal problems. Thus, the world today more than any other time in the past is in dire need of collective efforts by the stakeholders towards achieving meaningful and concrete resolutions and international policies on environmental protection.

Without any doubt, several efforts have been taken by governments and some individual organizations towards the conservation and preservation of a wholesome and conducive environment. Joseph Hyder (2018) mentioned that the first major International conference on environment under the umbrella of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) was held in Stockholm, Sweden,

in 1972, where issues concerning the environment and sustainable development were addressed. In this conference, representatives from 113 nations and over 400 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were in attendance. He also added that the second United Nations conference on environment (known as *Earth Summit* or *Rio Conference*) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. The conference which was attended by 108 heads of state and 2,400 accredited non-governmental organizations (NGO) from 178 nations focused primarily on solutions to the major environmental problems. In summer 2002, the third International conference on environment was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. However, several efforts have been taken thereafter towards achieving international resolutions on environmental protection by the governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO) across the globe.

The *Shariah* (Islamic law), however, has given special attention to the environmental issues since fourteen centuries ago as man is considered a trustee and an integral part of the natural world in its formation and growth. Several verses of the Qur'an and the Hadiths of the noble Prophet of Islam and his pure household (*Ahl al-Bayt*) either directly or otherwise have made references to numerous natural phenomena and the needs to safe-guard or protect it. Nevertheless, for the brevity of this research work, references shall be made thereafter only to the few instances.

## **1. Conceptual Analysis**

In order to have a proper understanding of the topic, it is imperative to give the definitions of the related terms such as 'environment', 'nature'; and 'Islam'.

### **1.1 Environment and Nature**

According to A. S. Hornby (2000), the term 'environment' is defined as "*the conditions that affect the behaviour and development of somebody or something; the physical conditions that somebody or something exists in.*" or "*the natural world in which people, animals and plants live.*" A nature on the other hand, is defined as "*all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people.*" In a nutshell, an environment are the natural surroundings or natural conditions in which man and other living organisms live. The nature on the other hand, is the whole universe and every created, not artificial thing.

## 1.2 Islam

The term '*Islam*' is derived from an Arabic root *S-L-M*; which According to Hans Wehr (1976) literally means "submission", "resignation" and "reconciliation" (to the will of God). However, according to Ibn Manzour (1993) and Az-Hari (2000), Islam in a religious context means a display of humbleness and obedience to the message of the Prophet. In other words, the term '*Islam*' is a religion of total and complete submission to the will and dictates of God, the Almighty and the directives of His Apostle; Hazrat Muhammad son of Abdullah. Thus, the adherents and followers of Islam are therefore referred to as Muslims.

## 2. Islamic Worldview on Nature and Environment

For almost fourteen centuries, Islam as a universal religion has paid special attention to both the personal and environmental hygiene. Generally, cleanliness is considered a part of faith and an obligatory prerequisite to the Muslims' acts of worship (*Ibadat*). Thus, Islam through its divine teachings greatly emphasizes on the cleanliness of the body, clothes, houses and the environment at large. Meanwhile, it is pertinent to briefly highlight the Islamic worldview on nature and environment as illustrated by the Qur'an.

### 2.1 Nature: A creation of God

Contrary to a belief that the universe evolved by accident, Islam believes that it is indeed among the creations of the Omnipotent God. He, based on a divine knowledge and wisdom, created and designed the universe and everything therein in an appropriate proportion. He adorned and furnished it with several beautiful natural features in order to make it conducive and habitable to human beings and other living organisms. Interestingly, there are hundreds of verses of the Qur'an in which God emphatically claimed to be the sole architect and creator of the heavens, earth, plants, animals, mountains, solar system and every other thing-that-exists. For instance, the Qur'an chapter 5 (*Surah Maidah*), verse 17, says:

*"...To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them. He creates whatever He wishes, and Allah has power over all things."*

In the light of those Quranic verses, it is obvious that the nature or natural environment, in which the human beings reside, is among the creations of God. Thus, the Islam's point of view is that nature or the natural environment was not just an accidental phenomenon; rather a God's creation.

## 2.2 Nature: A sacred sign of God

Generally, any artistic creation is indeed a manifest evidence of the wisdom and creativity of its creator and designer. Thus, in the Islamic worldview, the universe with its unique beauty and orderliness is without any doubt a manifestation of the divine wisdom, power, perfection and the creativity of God, the Omniscient. In accordance with the Qur'an, the heavens, earth, plants, animals, mountains, solar system were not created in vain and purposeless; rather, they were created as sacred signs of God Almighty.

There are numerous verses of the Qur'an in which the natural phenomena such as the alternation of night and day, alternation of the seasons, sailing of the ships at sea, falling of rainwater from the sky, revival of the earth after its death, grazing of animals on land, changing of the winds etc. are considered sacred signs of God. For instance, the Qur'an chapter 10 (*Surah Yunus*), verse 6, says:

*"Indeed in the alternation of night and day, and whatever Allah has created in the heavens and the earth, there are surely signs for a people who are Godway."*

## 2.3 Nature: A blessing of God

In accordance with the Islamic doctrine, God is believed to be the sole Provider and Nourisher of every creature. Human beings as His vicegerents on earth are provided free of charges with a conducive habitat, which supports life, land, water, oxygen, mountains, climate, solar systems, plants and animals etc. All these are considered as special bounties and favours of God upon human beings in order to guarantee their well-being and their survival on the globe.

Similarly, the nature according to the Qur'an is considered a divine trust at the disposal of human beings. Thus, in the same way they are responsible for its management and proper usages, they shall also be held accountable for its improper usages. For instance, the Qur'an chapter 35 (*Surah Fatir*), verse 3, says:

*O mankind! Remember Allah's blessing upon you! Is there any creator other than Allah who provides for you from the sky and the earth? There is no god except Him. So where do you stray?*

#### 2.4 Nature: An object of tribulation

As explained before, the universe with everything therein is indeed a part of creation and special blessings of God. In Islam's point of view, it is believed that every blessing of God is a means of testing or evaluating human beings on the surface of the earth. In view of this therefore, the nature (or the natural environment generally) according to the Qur'an is indeed a means of testing or evaluating human beings and to ascertain whether they shall be grateful (through proper use of the natural resources) or otherwise. For instance, the Qur'an chapter 18 (*Surah Al-Kahf*), verse 7, says:

*"Indeed, We have made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it that We may test them [to see] which of them is best in conduct."*

#### 2.5 Islamic Approaches to Environmental Conservation

In Islam, observing environmental principles and preventing any harmful element from the environment are viewed as among the primary human rights as well as the fundamental human obligations. For human being is part and parcel of the natural environment and his survival and well-being depend greatly on the wholesomeness of it. Interestingly, the well-being and wholesomeness of the environment is closely connected with the social well-being and vice versa. That is to say, if the environment is sanitized and wholesome, the inhabitants of such an environment would be hail and healthy. However, if the environment through environmental pollution, greenhouse effect, nuclear radioactivity etc. is made unwholesome, then, its inhabitants would suffer from its negative consequences.

Islam's concern and care for the environment, its conservation and protection can be seen through its command of planting of trees, revival of barren lands, removal of stones or other harmful materials from the road or pathway. Likewise, its strict prohibition of an indiscriminate cutting down of trees, pollution of running water, pollution of the environment, urinating under a tree or a shade and an extravagant use of the natural resources are clear indicators of an Islamic attitude to nature and environment.

It is on this basis, therefore, that there are numerous verses of the Qur'an and the *Hadiths* which enjoin a Muslim to always maintain environmental cleanliness and to protect the natural environment. The Qur'an, in several places portrays the nature or the natural environment with its orderliness and beauty as a manifestation of the power, wisdom, creativity and the beauty of the Supreme Being, Who is the sole Architect and Nurturer of the entire universe. In view of this, it is expected that it is treated

with utmost care and be protected against any form of corruption and environmental destruction. For instance, the Qur'an chapter 7 (*Surah Al-A'raf*), verse 56, says:

*“And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration, and supplicate Him with fear and hope: indeed Allah’s mercy is close to the virtuous”*

In the same way, there are several *Hadiths* of the Prophet and those of his purified household (*Ahl-al-Bayt*) in which human beings have been enjoined to protect the nature or the natural environment from hazards such as pollution, desertification, deforestation, natural resource depletion etc. as they are indeed a manifestation of corruption on earth and destruction of the environment. For instance, in the book *Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, page 292, the Prophet of Islam (*Peace be upon him and his household*) was reported to have also said: *“Three person are cursed owing to their misdeeds: One who defecates in the shade of houses, one who bars [another from using his due] portion of water [and instead appropriates it for one’s own use], one who obstructs a road in use”*. Similarly, in *Wasa'il al-Shia*, vol. 1, page 325, Imam Sadiq (*Peace be upon him*) was reported to have said: *“The Messenger of God prohibited defecation on the opening of a well in which people drink, or inside a river in which people drink, or beneath a fruitful tree”*. On the other hand, on page 320 of *Tuhaf al-'Uqoul*, Imam Sadiq (*Peace be upon him*) was quoted to have said: *“Life is not pleasant without three things: clean air, abundant fresh water, and fertile land”*.

Meanwhile, it is pertinent to say at the juncture that Islam encourages scientific and technological advancements but not at the expense of individual or societal well-being. Thus, any technological advancement which brought about destruction of life or degradation of the environment is absolutely prohibited in Islam. Thus, every scientific and technological advancement should be employed and channeled towards constructive but not destructive purposes. In view of this, therefore, the Islamic Jurists based on the principle of *“no injury”* strictly prohibit hazardous acts such as environmental pollution, deforestation, an extravagant use of natural resources, an inappropriate use of weapons of mass destruction etc.

## Conclusion

In Islam, the Qur'an is believed by the Muslims as an everlasting heavenly book, whose legislations are meant for the past, present and the future generations. Thus, both the Qur'an and the *Hadiths* enjoin human beings and particularly the Muslims to make proper use of the nature or the natural environment and to protect and preserve it from hazards such as pollution, ozone layer depletion, global warming, acid rain, desertification, deforestation, natural resource depletion etc.

Meanwhile, if human beings in general and Muslims in particular could observe the Islamic regulations and prescriptions with regards to the nature and environment, the world as a whole would definitely be a better place to live for all and sundry. And they would thereby live very comfortable and wholesome lives, which are free of pollution natural resources depletion depletion of the ozone layer, and every other environmental hazard. However, the non-compliance with these divine directives has resulted in numerous environmental problems in the contemporary World, which are great threats to the continuous existence of man on earth.

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