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Role of Humans in the Protection of the Environment: An Analysis in the Light of the Quran

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Abstract

This research explores the Quranic perspective on environmental protection by delving into key Quranic principles. Quran as the primary source of Islam provides fundamental teachings in every walk of life, emphasizing the status of God (Allah) as Creator of essential substance and sustainer of the universe and on the other hand, describes the role of humans as khalifa or guardians of the creation on Earth. the Quran highlights the significance of balance, and prevention of ISAF, by keeping the principle of justice, and accountability in each and every action. The concept of water as a fundamental element for life, linked with the encouragement to reflect on the signs of nature, provides a foundation for responsible environmental behavior. Drawing on verses from the Quran, this research outlines a framework for understanding the ethical and sustainable responsibilities of individuals as custodians of the environment in accordance with Quranic teachings.

Keywords: Responsibilities of Human, Environment, SDGs, Quran, Environment.

Introduction

Environmental challenge is one of the most critical challenges faced by the world as of October 2023.(*Global Issues 2024*, n.d. Retrieved on: 16/04/2024) According to the World Bank, there are many factors causing environmental disorders. Among them, pollution is the largest environmental cause of disease and premature death. This environmental challenge causes more than 9 million premature deaths.(*Pollution*, n.d. Retrieved on: 19/04/2024) That is several times more deaths than from AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined. Thus, environmental protection is of utmost importance as it serves as the bedrock for the sustenance of life on Earth. The complicated system of ecosystems, comprising diverse plants and wildlife, provides due services that support human life on earth, including clean air and water, fertile soil for food needs, and the regulation of climate.

The preservation of biodiversity does not only safeguard the fundamental value of diverse life but also ensures the flexibility of ecosystems against environmental disturbances. Moreover, responsible resource management is essential for the long-term viability of essential commodities and industries. Beyond economic considerations, environmental conservation is linked to public health, with clean environments playing a pivotal role in preventing diseases and promoting overall well-being. As we grapple with the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource reduction, recognizing and prioritizing the importance of environmental conservation is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic necessity for the sustainability of our planet and the generations to come.

Islam, the religion of humanity, in its teachings, emphasizes the human role in the protection of the environment from different perspectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Keeping in mind the impact of this challenge, various research works have been conducted in different dimensions of the problem, in our humble knowledge these works lack the role of Humans in the Qur'anic perspective.

- 1. Carraro, Carlo, and Domenico Siniscalco. "Strategies for the international protection of the environment." Focuses on the strategies for protection and recommends a supernational authority for the regulations of countries and regions. (Carraro & Siniscalco, 1993)
- 2. Lopez, Aurelie. "The protection of environmentally displaced persons in international law." This research focuses on the one of the major effects of the problem which is displacement in the legal perspective.





- 3. Farugee, Rashid, and A. R. Kemal in their research "Role of Economic policies in protecting the environment: The experience of Pakistan [with Comments]." focus on the policy matters related to the economic domain. (Faruque & Kemal, 1996)
- 4. Where as Ashtankar, O. M. focuses on the "Islamic perspectives on environmental protection." Describe general viewpoint of Islam on the issue. (Ashtankar, 2016)

MEHODOLOGY

The research adopts an inductive approach focused on dig upping principles and fundamental teachings from the Quran mentioning the human role in environmental protection, directly or indirectly. After a systematic examination of Quranic verses, the research aims to identify key themes, principles, and ethical guidelines regarding environmental management. This methodological framework seeks to derive insights from the Quran to provide a deeper understanding of the ethical components of human interactions with the atmosphere.

ENVIRONMENT AND ITS ELEMENTS IN OURAN

Everything that surrounds us, including living and non-living things, physical, chemical, and other natural forces are known as the environment. Here we can say that the environment includes living and non-living things.

- a. Living things, such as: Humans, animal, plants etc.
- b. Non-living things, such as: Soil, water, mountains etc. (Hanrahan, 2011, p. 4)

Word "environment" as it is an English word, and is not mentioned in the Holy Quran. Whereas the essential parts as mentioned above are referred various times. Keeping in the view the environment and its ingredients, in Arabic language there are variety of words used for the environment. Among them al-bii'a (البيئة) is largely used for Environment, the triliteral word with roots of $(b\bar{a}\ w\bar{a}w\ hamza = (\psi \ e^{i})$ is also mentioned in Qur'an 17 times. (Corpus.Quran, n.d.) This triliteral is use in different meanings i.e. bring back, return, place of (residence, adobe, return), home, posting. Raghib Asfahani an expert of meanings of Qur'anic words mentioned the details in his book titled: "al-Mufridat". (Asfahani, n.d., p. 159)

Indeed, the Quran comprehensively references essential elements of the environment, highlighting the significance of the natural world in Islamic teachings. The recurrence of words such as Ad-Dunya occurs 133 times, al-'ard occurs 461 times, as-samaa' occurs 310 times, al-ma' occurs 63 times, sahab occurs 9 times, matar occurs 21 times and bahr occurs 41 times. (Corpus. Quran, n.d.) It reflects the importance of our environment for the living and nonliving components of the Earth. The repetition environmental terms over a thousand times stresses the importance of environmental awareness and responsible bond in Islamic principles. This linguistic richness serves to reinforce the recognition of nature as a divine creation and encourages believers to reflect on the signs of God within the awarded balance of the environment. The Quran's rich vocabulary in describing the environment, contributes to a comprehensive understanding of Allah's mercy on Human on one hand and on other hand it describes Human's relationship with the natural world, promoting a sense of reverence and responsibility towards the Earth on one hand and on the Humanity.

BENEFICIARIES OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN QURAN

The Quran is full of verses that explain the facts about the creation and sustenance of the universe. These verses emphasize the might of Allah, His wisdom, His power, and purpose behind the existence. Mentioning the fact of the creation from its origin, Allah says:

"Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is, over all things, Disposer of affairs".

Here the word "Wakeel" is referring to his continuous care of the universe. This is mentioned in various verses of Quran mentioning word "Rabb". As in Surah Al fatiha Allah Says:

[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the world]

The term "Rabb" (زَبّ) is indeed a significant attribute of Allah mentioned frequently in the Quran, accruing 975 times. It includes a multilayered meaning that goes beyond mere creation; it signifies Allah's role as the Nurturer, Sustainer, and Master of all existence. Imam Raghib Asfahani, a reputed scholar of Quranic Studies, clarifies the meaning of "Rabb" in his work "Mufradat al-Quran" as follows:

"الرَّبُّ في الأصل التربية وهو إنشاء الشيء حالا فحالا إلى حدّ التمام... المتكفّل بمصلحة الموجودات(Asfahani, n.d., p. 336)" It is the development of something time to time to the point of perfection... The in charge for the interests of the assets.

Allah's attribute as the "Rabb" of the universe, is truly reflected in the extreme balance and order, found in the physical world. Allah has created everything in accurate measure and proportion, indicating a purposeful and systematic design, leading to a great and mighty Designer.

Scientists, through their observations and studies of the universe, frequently discover the perfect and finetuned mechanisms that govern the universe and make them service providers to the Human. From the vastness of galaxies to the tiny structures of cells, the natural world exhibits a remarkable coherence and unity. The idea that everything has been created in its required amount, serving a purpose, and contributing to the well-





being of life, aligns with the concept of Allah's wisdom and mercy, including His role as the ultimate "Rabb" of the Universe. As mentioned in Surah Al Qamar Allah says:

Indeed, all things We created with predestination.

Besides, above mentioned Ayat, the balance among the creation is mentioned in surah Rehman:

"And He raised the heaven and imposed the balance.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that all the creations except humans are created to provide the serves and benefits the the Human. Allah has mentioned it in Surah Al Baqarah as follows:

"It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth.

In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that each and every thing is created for the human being. Due to this relation of Human and other creation, the role of human increases as the human is main beneficiary of all creatures.

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Centralized role of Human in the universe demands his responsible behavior towards the Universe. Protecting the environment is an essential aspect of sustainable development, which aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In General perspective this includes reducing pollution and waste, conserving natural resources, and addressing the impacts of climate change. It also involves creating policies and systems that promote sustainable practices in areas such as agriculture, transportation, and energy production. Additionally, protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services is crucial for achieving sustainable development. In Islam, the protection of the environment is viewed as a religious duty and is closely linked to the concept of stewardship (khalifah) of the earth. As mentioned in the following Ayat:

"And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority."

Muslims are taught that they have a responsibility to protect and preserve the natural world, as it is a gift from God and should be respected and protected.

Islam emphasizes the importance of preserving natural resources and protecting the environment in several ways. For example, Islamic teachings encourage the use of natural resources in a sustainable and responsible way and prohibit waste and excessive consumption. It also promotes conservation of natural resources, such as water, and encourages the planting of trees and the protection of animals and their habitats. Additionally, Islamic principles of social justice and fairness also play an important role in addressing the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, which disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized.

Overall, the protection of the environment is seen as an integral part of leading a virtuous and moral life in Islam and it is essential for achieving sustainable development in the Muslim world.

The Holy Qur'an and Sunnah provide basic framework in the promotion of sustainable development in Islamic societies. Although such calling of good work has surfaced in today's world, the encouragement for the wellbeing of our environment has long been mentioned and practiced by the Prophet (Peace be upon Him). In his actions and response to the environment, we can deduce that the planet we are living in is, in fact, our responsibility to care for it. As narrated in a hadith, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri R.A. reported that the Prophet PBUH. Said:

"The world is sweet and green, and verily Allah is going to appoint you as vicegerents in it in order to see how you act".

ROLE OF HUMAN IN THE UNIVERSE

According to Quranic perspectives, Human beings, hold an outstanding and unique status due to their relation to other creations. This status is embedded in the belief that humans are guardians, supervisors, or caretakers of the Earth, entrusted with the care and preservation of the environment. Allah has named this role Khilifah. This unique status is mentioned in following Ayat within story Adam's creation:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority."

The rationale behind this status lies in the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living things and the understanding that responsible human actions contribute to the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. Environmental custodianship aligns with ethical and moral principles, promoting a balanced coexistence with the creation for the benefit of present and future generations.



Allah has awarded this status to the Human due to his extraordinary ability as mentioned in different verses of Quran in different aspects.

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Humans, as guardians of the Earth, are assigned with different roles and duties towards the environment. These responsibilities are surrounded to qualities and responsibilities of a trustee. This responsibility is stated in Surah Al Ahzab in following words:

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا ٱلْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى ٱلسَّمُوْتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱلْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَن يَخْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا ٱلْإِنشُنُ ﴿(Al-Quran, n.d., p. 33:72) Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it.

The above Ayah mentions the core responsibility of human as a trustee of this Universe and its ingredients. Humans as trustees of the Earth, are entrusted by Allah with the care and management of the environment besides getting benefits from it. It is mandatory (واجب) responsibility on a trustee to take care of the assets held within a Trust. (Al Mosuah Al Fighiyah Al Kuwaitiyah, 2006, p. 6/237) Here the human is declared as trustee. Due to this the environment and the surroundings are an asset which is and will remain under humans custody. According to this duty, the Human being is allowed to get benefit from the environment besides looking after and management with all possible steps. It is not allowed to humans to take any step causing partial or total damage to the environment. Engaging in actions that result in harmful effects on the environment is considered as violation of trust and an act of betrayal. The violation of orders and damage will result as punishment as per the requirements of the trust-trustee terms. Such behavior is also regarded as a

"O you who have believed, do not betray Allah and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know [the consequence]"

As custodian of the Environment, it is the duty of a Human to behave responsibly towards tiny creatures of Allah and do not harm the atmosphere. It is human nature, whenever he or she feel any attraction in anything, they try to get it in a big amount, due to an insatiable greed that often overshadows reason and leads to exploitation of natural resources. In Surah Al Anfal Allah has categorically mentioned that all the valuable things and your child are a test for you. He says:

"And know that your properties and your children are but a trial and that Allah has with Him a great reward ".

As a human we must have to understand that the environment is also a valuable thing which gives us benefits through its oxygen, gravity, water and other various sources below and above the earth. The Human have to look up these things as trustee of the Earth. As per the original owner Allah has allowed him to take benefit from it, besides instructions that the Human as responsible creation is not allowed to damage to the environment.

DUTIES TOWARDS ENVIRONMENT

The Quran addresses the concept of environmental protection and the role of humans in several verses. While the Quran does not provide clear commands on environmental conservation in the modern sense, scholars and environmentalists have interpreted certain verses to emphasize the importance of stewardship, responsibility, and sustainable living. Here are some key points to consider when analyzing the role of humans in the protection of the environment in the light of the Quran:

1. STEWARDSHIP

The Quran describes humans as stewards or vicegerents (khulafa) on Earth. This stewardship implies a responsibility to manage and care for the Earth and its resources in a manner that is just and sustainable, else the status of human will decrees in front of Allah and Allah will not consider that human who is damaging the environment as corrupt one. In Surah Al-Baqara Allah says:

"And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption."

Every Muslim seek to be dear to Allah. Keeping this Ayah, if we still want to be near and dear to Allah we are obligated to show responsible behavior towards the Environment.

Considering the water and oil sources, the human as Khalifa on the Earth has to set priorities in the wider interest of other humans and the environment. Whereas nearly half of the estimated 1 million tons of oil that makes its way into marine environments each year comes not from tanker spills but from land-based sources such as factories, farms, and cities. At sea, tanker spills account for about 10 percent of the oil in waters around the world, while regular operations of the shipping industry—through both legal and illegal discharges contribute about one-third. (Melissa Denchak, n.d.) It damages the environment from its substance; both the earth and seas. As it is mentioned in the Quran that the destructor of both are humans by themselves.





{ ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِهَا كَسَبَثُ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ } [الروم: 41]

i. **EXCESS (ISRAF):**

Israf is mentioned in the Quran Multiple times. It means excess use of anything. Worldwide, the water is being used for different purposes other than drinking. According to the research conducted at McGill University 65% of residential water is used in the bathroom specially during washing the face, hands, cleaning teeth, taking shower and in flushing. (Mcgill. Ca, n.d.) And a major part of this process contains wastefulness resulting from the negligence. The Quran mentions the wistfulness as sin whereas to avoid this act is considered as duty of human towards the environment. The Quran condemns wastefulness (israf) and extravagance. In Surah Al-A'raf Allah says:

It is stated that wastefulness is a characteristic of the devil. This can be interpreted as a prohibition against overconsumption and the unsustainable use of natural resources.

BALANCE (MIZAN):

As Mentioned above, that as per the relation of Man and Universe, the Human can take benefit from the environment, as it is to serve human. Here it is worth mentioning that a balanced, measured and managed use of resources can develop a sustainable environment, whereas misuse and desire of collecting resources in one hand can lead towards the total demolition of the environment and ultimate destruction of all humanity. Here a research can strengthen the fact that due to unbalanced and overuse of sources more than 70% of earth's fresh water is being used by agriculture, farming and livestock whereas these three are serious water polluters.(Fao.Org, n.d.) http://www.fao.org/docrep/w2598e/w2598e04.htm Here the individuals and the governments should take responsibility to make sure that the water or other sources of may be used smartly, and every step towards mismanagement in this case should be treated as serious offence.

The concept of balance in each and every integrated part of the universe is emphasized in the Quran, multiple times. Muslims are encouraged to maintain a balance in their actions and relationships with the environment. In Surah Ar-Rahman Allah says:

The Quran mentions that God created everything in balance, and humans should not disrupt this balance.

iii. **JUSTICE:**

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The Quran emphasizes justice and fairness in human behavior. This extends to the treatment of the environment and its resources. Sustainable practices that ensure equitable distribution of resources and protection of the rights of all living beings align with the principles of justice in Islam. In Surah Al Maida Allah described this duty of Human towards the environment as under: (Al-Quran, n.d., p. 7:85) {وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَغْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ذَلِكُمْ مَنْيُرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ }

This above verse is mentioned in the Quran after five major sins, but the wording indicates that the destruction after the rectification in all means is not allowed, whether it is in shape of believe, fight or in other shape destructs the environment. This aspect is discussed by Imam Fakhar al Din Razi in his Tafsir as follows:

The Ayah is forbidding the Worldly and Religious sins. (Razi, n.d., p. 14/314)

The above verse is a prime example of the Quran's emphasis on environmental stewardship and sustainable living. It aligns with the Islamic principle of justice and fairness, extending it to the treatment of the Earth and its resources on individual to international levels.

ACCOUNTABILITY (MAS'ULIYAH): iv.

The Quran repeatedly mentions that humans will be held accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment. This accountability extends to how individuals, and nations have treated the environment and its inhabitants. This concept can be interpreted as a motivation for responsible and ethical environmental behavior. In Surah Ar-Rum Allah says:

(ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتُ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَغْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ) (Al-Quran, n.d., p. 30:41) Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].



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This verse highlights that everything on Earth is a blessing from Allah and humans are entrusted with its care. The implication is that humans will be held accountable for how they utilize these resources. Also, the accountability in this world is needed to avoid destruction of environment and the last day's accountability. Here an example can be helpful to improve our attention towards individual accountability; in Muslim societies, purification through ablution (Wudu') is obligatory for five-time Namaz. The average use for the ablution is scientifically measured as 5-liter to 10-liter per person, whereas the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) was using only 688 ml for His ablution. Here an individual accountability lies on a Muslim to perform his or her role in sustainability adopting the Prophet's modest use of water during purification (Wadu).

Conclusion

In the light of above discussion, the research concludes that the Quran defines the Human as beneficiary of the Universe. Here the responsibilities lie on the beneficiary of the Universe according to the ability of the Human. As per the above discussion and examples and verses mentioned in the research the Quran provides a profound framework for understanding human responsibility toward environmental protection. Central concepts provide guiding principles for Muslims; such as stewardship of human on the earth (Khilafah), balance (Mizan), avoiding excess (Israf), justice ('Adl) in term of accountability (Taqwa) and the responsible use of natural resources. serve as guiding principles for Muslims.

Recommendations

As per the limitations of this research, above mentioned responsibilities were focused. Whereas the Quran emphasizes that humans are entrusted with the care of the Universe and are responsible to maintain balance. The Quranic perspective on interconnectedness of universe and its environment and correlation with Human underscores the idea that harming the environment ultimately harms humanity. Scholars and environmentalists within the Islamic field would conduct various research to explore and interpret these principles, applying them to address current challenges i.e. climate change, pollution, and resource reduction.



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