

Eco-theology and Quran: A Reading of Select Ayat of Quran from Eco-Theological Point of View

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Abstracts: While homo sapiens are in the race to occupy the Moon and Mars, it is disheartening to note that they have degraded and destroyed the planet that has been their one and only one habitat for billions of years. The human attitude of subduing and mastering the earth has resulted in a large-scale change in bio-diversity and other ecosystem processes. Air pollution, water pollution, uncontrolled deforestation, rampant industrialization, urbanization and bioengineering have destabilized the harmony and balance in the whole ecosystem. Alarm bells have already been tolling in this regard and concerned people have been discussing the way forward. Preservation and protection of the environment is being talked about at all the available platforms. Theologies across different religions are being reinterpreted so that awareness among human beings could be raised in this direction. Eco-theology, therefore, has emerged as one of the most important disciplines in the recent five decades. In this paper, an attempt shall be made to present an eco-theological reading of the select ayat of the Holy Quran, a book that enlightens and guides the followers of the second largest and the fastest growing religion of the world, Islam.

Keywords: Eco- Theology; Quran; Ayat; Principles; Applications in Contemporary Times.

1. INTRODUCTION

Man is considered to be the most superior animal in the great chain of being. He is called a social animal, a rational animal, a speaking animal, an animal that knows the art of nurturing, conquering through knowledge production, and, of course, an animal who is capable of anything. In his earlier avatar, man is said to have been in a state of harmony with other animals and living species; and, such a mutual coexistence was based on the principle of 'live and let others live with peace and dignity'; however, as man became conscious of his potential and powers, he, slowly and gradually started his mission occupation and conquest; therefore, land, plants and animals became for him, with the passage of time, objects that he can use, market and enslave for his materialistic gains. As long as such an attitude was based on supporting each other on mutually complementing grounds and coexistence, the principle of equilibrium as such did not get affected negatively; however, the moment such an attitude turned man into a greedy and lustful animal, the covenant of unity and coexistence was broken. The man who lived in harmony with other animals all of a sudden started seeing himself as the 'Master' of all other forms of life; and, the sole aim of his life became mastery and conquest of nature, thereby becoming the agent of rampant damage to the whole ecosystem and the latent and the manifest equilibrium with which it operates. Man ignored the concepts of 'balance', 'compassion', 'mercy' and 'harmony' with which God wants him to live on the earth in relation to his fellow human beings and other forms of life including animals and plants. While God declared 'lust', 'greed', 'arrogance', 'gluttony' and 'injustice' as causes of fall for man, man went on ignoring all the principles of fairness, justice, balance and compassion, thereby axing his own feet, particularly in the context of environment as a whole. Human progress, modernization, scientific and technological developments and evolution of knowledge systems contributed to man's arrogance and superiority-complex, thereby not allowing him to think how mutually inter-dependent all of us are. Modernization and scientific development, thus, became a bane in the hands of man. Factories, industries, railway tracks, skyscrapers, super-markets and a host of other activities became an excuse for man for deforestation, demolition of mountains, mining and other such activities; in the name of scientific research and fun of modern man, the zoological parks led to the imprisonment of thousands of animals. However, with the passage of time, sensitive people and men of heart and conscience realized that man is destabilizing the equilibrium of the planet and is literally axing his own feet. Such a concern led to the development of Ecological Studies, Ecocriticism in Literature and Eco-theology in religious studies across cultures. The development of such disciplines bears witness to the fact that something has really gone wrong and a timely action is the need of the hour.

What is Eco-Theology?

Eco-theology is a blend of two words: eco and theology. While the word eco refers to ecology and environment, theology is the study of religious texts and scriptures. The combination of these two words results in the marriage and intersection between two different disciplines: ecological studies and religious studies, thereby providing the reader off a religious scriptures with an opportunity to understand what a particular religious scripture has to say about environment and nature; and, how the teachings of that scripture are going to emancipate human understanding with regard to his limited knowledge about environment and nature, thereby enabling a spiritual transformation within him with regard to the external environment. Nature and environment, thus, is not become object of conquest of human superiority in the framework of eco-theological view of environment; it is rather a benign and humane approach with which religious scriptures want him to treat nature. This paper begins with the hypothesis that the Quranic text offers us insights that could be used for the preservation and sustenance of environment and nature. As Islam is being the second largest and the fastest growing religion of the world, it is quite obvious that if the insights and the principles of the Quran are interpreted from eco-theological point of view, billions of its readers and followers could be motivated and inspired to work for the preservation of environment and its protection.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Yusuff al-Qardhawi is one of the leading Islamic scholars of the late 20th century. In his book, *Ri'āyat al-bī'ah fi Sharīah al-Islām*, he declares that preservation and protection of environment is directly related to the protection of human soul, mind, human race and human wealth; in other words, if environment is not safe, all these four important aspects of human life are not safe as well. Qardhawi, in fact, uses the term, *hifdh al-bī'ah*, for the development of his environmental jurisprudence; and, among contemporary scholars on Islam, his ideas and jurisprudence regarding environment could be counted among the most original in the Islamic Eco-theological literature.

In *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (2003), edited by Richard Foltz, Fredrick M. Denny and Azizan Bahruddin and having twenty-three essays by veteran scholars on the theme, the contributors not only talk about the environmental ethics of Islam and the Quranic principles in that regard but they also bring to our attention the richness of Islamic tradition regarding eEcology and its applications by Muslim societies across the world.

In *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches here and there*, the author of the book, Aldo Leopold, makes an interesting statement that “ We do not live in the world; we live with the word” (), thereby suggesting that man needs to change and transform his approach towards all other living and non-living things that surround us on the only planet available to human beings and other forms of life for mutual coexistence and mutually interdependent life.

“ We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?” (); Lawson (2017, 109) quotes this ayat to make the point that Quranic idea of ‘signs’ is also aimed at pointing to the glorious transmission and source of all signs: Quranic ayat, the world of phenomenon and the world within man and every animal; the world of nature is, thus, a reflection of His glory and the visible world of phenomenon such as the sun, the moon, the change of seasons, and everything that we surrounds us and is observable or non-observable is, thus, to be perceived as a meaningful, purposive and musical symphony of His glory.

Khalid (2019, 153) establishes a relationship between the ayat in natural world and the ayat in the Quran. The signs(ayat) in the natural world and the signs (ayat) in the Quran are two books revealed by Almighty Allah so that man may thinkg and ponder on His glory; similarly, Ibrahim Ozdemir (2003, 21) asserts that nature is a sacred book and each object in it has an intrinsic value unlike what human beings generally tend to see in it in terms of instruments and capital.

Tawhid is one of the fundamental central views that the Quranic teachings revolve around. Abdul Matin (

2010(2010, 6) asserts that the Quranic concept of tTawhid guides us towards understanding the Universe as something aglow with continuity; in other words, seeing the Universe as a manifestation of Unity of Being or in wholistic terms, something, if denied, would lead man to 'kufr' from eco-theological point of view. Based on this understanding of the Quran and nature, Abdul Matin coins the term 'Green Deen', thereby making the point that the core Quranic principles speak for maintaining the equilibrium, harmony and beauty of the Universe through the beautiful conduct of man. The negative human conduct such as polluting the earth and the water bodies on it are destructive patterns of human conduct which need modification and reformation through eco-theological education and intervention according to Abdul Matin.

There are hundreds of instances in the Quran when Allah asks man to observe the world of nature, think about it and find for himself the glory of Allah in all those natural phenomena. Ozdemir (2003, 11) asserts that " Therefore, every creature deserves attention and consideration for its relation to the Divine"; and, it naturally follows from this statement that all forms of life other than human beings have lives of their own and they also have a right to live, thereby leaving no scope for human beings to think of encroaching upon their lives, as they too, according to the Quran, constitute communities, having their own languages and ability to communicate(Ozdemir, 2003, 23-4).

Harmala (2014) studies Muslim environmentalism in her book titled (). In her study, she interviews Muslim informants engaged in permaculture and sustainable agriculture; most of her informants highlight the importance of developing a personal relation to nature through studying the signs Allah has put into action and contemplating over them; and, it is different functions of plants and ecosystems and their own working on the soil that help them in understanding the diversity and interdependence of everything in nature; in fact, most of her informants see nature as a gift from Allah, each object in which is active with an innate principle of balance and unity. Similar to the findings of Abdul Matin, most of the informants of Harmala express the opinion that pollution, corruption, climate change, soil erosion and lack of animal welfare are all because of the anarchy that man's greed and lust for material possessions has caused; and, in order to set the things back in order and place, human beings need a spiritual awakening and theological understanding regarding the issue in hand (Harmala, 2014, 43).

Key Quranic concepts from Eco-theological point of view

Scholars have identified four key concepts in the Quran that can be used for Islamic conservation practice. In the words of Khalid, these four key concepts are as follows:

" Tawhid, which embodies the principle of unity of the Creator and His creation and is the basis of the holistic approach which is intrinsically Islamic;

Fitra, which imparts an understanding of the creation principle and locates the human species firmly in it;

Mizan, which recognizes the principle that every aspect of creation holds together because it is in a state of balance.

Khalifa (a variant of Khilafah), which identifies the responsibility principle and the role of the human in the grand pattern of creation" (Khalid,).

Other key concepts that are being interpreted in Islamic Eco-theology include: Islam (Submission), Ihsan (doing the things in the most beautiful way), responsibility of man as a result of being Allah's steward on the earth, amanah (trust bestowed upon man by Allah), adl (justice) and being humble in one's conduct and approach towards everything on the earth.

Humanity as Stewards

The Quran at a number of places in its text presents human beings as the vicegerents or stewards of Allah on the earth; therefore, they are according to this given role responsible caretakers of the earth. The word khalifah has been translated as God's vicegerent by some translators, while there are translators who have used the words like

steward, guardian or successor as the suitable English alternative for the Arabic word khalifah. Although the word has been used as the political title of Caliph, yet from eco-theological point of view a holistic understanding of the word would associate the meanings of protector and steward of the Earth with the word khalifah, an alternative understanding which makes humankind as a whole responsible for the preservation, protection and sustainability of the environment as a whole available to mankind and other forms of life on the earth; and, man thus would be accountable for all the wrongs and corruptions and anarchies that he may spread on the earth, thereby causing degradation and destruction to the environment. The concept of khilafah, thus, could be better understood in terms of man being only a steward of the earth and not as someone who has to rule the planet and exploit negatively the natural resources available on it; the reason being that the title of khilafah is also bound with the covenant of responsibility and trust (amanah), according to which man has to walk on the earth humbly and treat fellow human beings, animals, trees and all other animate or in-animate things with love, compassion and mercy, thereby committing himself to the cause of harmony, equilibrium and unity of being. There are in the Quran some nine places where mankind has been addressed as God's vicegerents or stewards: "God appointed you successors of the earth"(35:39) and the other ayat of this group(24:55; 6: 165); similarly, there are ayat which declare mankind as 'inheritors of the Earth' like "It is He who has made you inheritors of the Earth, and He has raised you in ranks, some above the others that He may test you for what he has given you..." (Q. 6:165).

This simply means that the title of khilafah is a test for mankind so that God may see how they (human beings) treat each other and how they treat other creatures like plants, animals and insects; in fact, it is the principle of responsibility, trust and test associated with the title that adds environmental meaning to the title of khilafah because otherwise its meaning would not be complete; how would man fulfil the responsibility and the covenant of trust that he has with God if he is not going to work for the protection, sustainability and balance of the whole ecosystem that God has created as a sign and blessing for his life on the earth. Eco-theologians, thus, primarily see man as someone who according to the Quran is entrusted with the job of maintaining balance, order, harmony and equilibrium on the earth; in other words, someone who has respect for bio-diversity, diversity of languages, colours and other such natural phenomenon. Needless to mention, the Quran time and again reminds mankind that dominion is reserved for Allah alone, and such powers have not been bestowed upon mankind: "To God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth" (42:49; 48:14); "To God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth"(42:4)and many such ayat in the Quran; in other words, man has to act as a steward not as someone who has the dominion over the earth and whatever there is in and above it.

Amana

The covenant of trust like khilafah is one of the most important principles that eco-theologians of Islamic tradition invoke with regard to the environmental education in the Quran. Man, according to the covenant of trust, has a huge responsibility with regard to care for all the creatures; of special interest in this regard is protection of all creations from the misdeeds of man himself. Being the steward of the earth, man is entrusted to take care of each other, animals, plants and all other forms of animate and in-animate creations. The Quran describes the covenant of trust in these words: "We did indeed offer the trust(al-amanah) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains. But they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof, but humanity undertook it. They were indeed unjust and foolish" (Q.33:72). Abdul Matin () interprets this covenant as a blessing and gift from God and simultaneously as a duty that man is bound to perform; however, Gade (2019, 113) sees it as a criterion for "being tested"; that is why the ayat mentions them as 'unjust' and 'foolish' upon accepting the trust rashly and in hurry. Upon reading the ayat, one may notice it that the heavens, the earth and the mountains exercised their free will with regard to the choice; in fact, it could be sensed that they perhaps could understand the enormity of the task being offered to them but human beings perhaps could not understand what they were signing up for. From eco-theological point of view, the ayat regarding the covenant of trust may also be interpreted as if it portrays the heavens, the earth and the mountains as active agencies and participants and having a superior consciousness as compared with man, a fact which is testified to by the following ayat of the Quran as well: "Don't you see that to Allah bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals; and, a great number among humankind" (22:18;13:15); such ayat in the Quran promise profound environmental education for mankind and the covenant of trust signed by man with God makes man responsible for taking due care of all of His

creations, animate and in-animate, in order to prove the legitimacy of his (man's) status as the steward of the earth by dispelling all his tendencies towards corruption, anarchy, lawlessness and causing instability and degradation to environment as a whole; thus, man as ashraf ul makhluqat will continue to have this status as long as he follows the covenant of the trust in letter and spirit; and, any deviation from this trust will cause him to degrade himself to the "lowest of the low"(95:5) in the Quranic scheme of education.

Principle of Balance

Man as the steward of the earth having signed the covenant of trust with God for taking due care of all His creations is bound to protect, guard and keep intact the principle of balance which is operative in all the animate and in-animate things of our world or environment; if he in any way or by any of his acts destabilizes the principle of equilibrium and balance, he will be held accountable by God and will have to pay the price. According to the Quran, God has created everything with perfect balance(mizan); for example, " He (Allah) set up the balance so that you may not exceed the balance. Weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance. He has spread out the earth for living creatures. With its fruits and date-palms with sheathed clusters, also grain on leafy stems and fragrant herbs; then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?"(Q.55:7-13). This ayat and many of its kind in the Quran provide one of the strongest environmental principles for mankind whose corrupt deeds are responsible for all imbalances on the earth. Mizan , thus, holds central importance in the Quranic view of environment; and, when read in proper perspective, the principle of balance actually forms the core of Quranic teachings on life and environment as a whole and the concepts of justice and equality are all the time related to it with reference to all the major and minor issues of life as a whole on the earth; in other words, any human act aimed at causing imbalance to nature, environment and ecosystem is directly proportionate to transgressing the boundaries set by God. The catastrophe that mankind is witnessing in environmental terms is because of man-made disruption to the system of balance and equilibrium with which God has made the nature operational and is, thus, a sin that God would hold mankind accountable for according to the covenant of trust and man's responsibility as the steward of the earth. In " A Quranic Environment", the author of the essay writes:

" While humanity has taken on particular responsibility to care for God's creation on earth, the Quran emphasizes that humans must accept relational limits for the sake of God. In fact, it states categorically the imperative to maintain explicit "limits (hudud) set by God," such as that expressed in the command not to "corrupt the earth." Commonly cited verses of this type in the Quran include those that express clearly the divine command not to sacrifice a " she-camel," relayed to the community of the Prophet Salih in the book's account of the sacred past. This command was disobeyed by his people, called Thamud, according to the story, which the Quran recounts more than once. The consequence of Thamud's disobedience is one of the many "punishment narratives" of the Quran, which in themselves provide a great depth of material for contemplating " natural" disaster in the environment as the consequential effect of human action transgressing limits."(p.89)

Adl in Islamic eco-theology

Justice is one of the most important and essential principles of the Quran; in social, economic, political, private, individual, environmental and spiritual terms, the Quran time and again in its text asks Muslims and mankind as a whole to be just in their actions and deeds. In eco-theological terms, the concepts of khilafah, responsibility, trust and balance are all actually inter-related and so is the principle of justice with all of them; for example, the Quran says, " Weigh with justice and skimp not in balance; He set the earth down for all beings with its fruit, its palm trees with clustered sheaths"(Q 55:9-11); and when the Quran says, " There are no creatures ...who are not communities like yourselves" (Q 6:28), doesn't it indicate that all creatures have their rights and man is responsible for taking due care of them with justice, compassion and mercy like he is supposed to do in case of his own fellow human beings. Since man is asked to be just in his actions and deeds scores of times in the Quran, doesn't that imply that his justice, compassion and mercy are also the right of the earth, the water bodies, the flora and the fauna and, in short, the whole eco-system? According to the Quran, man is responsible for maintaining the equilibrium of the environment because he has taken an oath on that account; in view of that oath and covenant of trust, man is supposed to treat everything surrounding him with justice, mercy and compassion; in fact, he has to be a muhsin

with regard to his dealing with everything. Needless to mention, the concept of *ihsan* in the Quran is suggestive of being beautiful in conduct and deeds and speech, something that makes man more beautiful in the sight of God according to the Quran.

Discussion on Select Ayat

The Quran is the word of Almighty Allah, the sole objective of which is the construction of a man who is in harmony with the commands of the Lord, and, of course, the whole of the universe; therefore, it symbolizes peace, stability, harmony, goodness, kindness and beauty in both literal and metaphorical sense of these words; in other words, the Quran teaches '*ihsan*' (beauty) and develops the potential of beauty in man through its system of education which includes: 1) nourishment of soul and mind through various daily mandatory actions and prayers; 2) nourishment of human conduct and behavior through a codal procedure which restricts man from crossing limits and boundaries in all the actions which man may carry out in his routine life; 3) development of such a worldview in man which teaches him to take due care of rights and duties with reference to fellow human beings and other living organisms; and 4) initiation of man on such a beautiful path of life where his soul is in a complete submission before Allah; and the lusts and desires of man are subservient to Allah's will alone. While putting man on the journey to discover his purpose of life under the sun, Allah instructs, guides and teaches him through different internal and external sources: Books, Prophets, Conscience, Natural Phenomenon, etc.

There is a multitude of I am going to invoke some such ayat inof the Quran which teach, guide and instruct man towards light and right path in all the aspects of life, including environment. In these ayat, Allah invokes natural objects and phenomenon, and demonstrates through them the essences and core meanings of human life which man willingly or unwillingly ignores most of the times.

As every student of the Quran knows it fully well, the Quranic text has two types of chapters: Makkan and Madani. Makkan chapters/ayat were revealed upon Prophet Mohammad (SAW) when he was in Makka. Most of the Makkan chapters are reflective and contemplative in nature. The method of teaching, remembrance, reminder and instruction in most of these chapters/ ayat is both deductive and inductive. The contemplative and reflective nature of these chapters/ayat, therefore, seeks the attention of the readers and the /target audience towards the internal as well as the external phenomena of human life/ Universe, hence the patterns of invoking nature again and again with reference to themes of tawhid, messengerhood and life after death.

The fact of invoking nature for teaching and instruction in Makkan chapters may be grounded in the reason that while the Quranic ayat were being revealed upon the Prophet Arabs as a whole were living in deserts. In desert areas, people are by and large reflective and contemplative; the reason being that desert people would watch stars without the intervention of flood lights of cities and towns; they would travel in deserts while taking the guidance of the route from the starlit sky; the same would happen when they would go for a trip in oceans; therefore, such adventures in deserts and oceans would turn them reflective and contemplative. Allah, when He started revealing the Quran on Mohammad (SAW) at the cave of Hira in Makkah, chose the same reflective and contemplative style of address in the Quran. Moreover, Makkan people at that time were known for their poetry and command on language; therefore, Allah chose the same poetically powerful language and style to liberate them from the clutches of slavery of false gods and desires and lusts of their own making; hence, goes a different style of language and address in Makkan ayat and chapters as a whole. Needless to mention, all these ayat/ chapters like other parts of the Quran are directed towards education, emancipation and upliftment of human soul by engaging them with questions that derive their significance from the world of nature and its phenomenon of operation and functioning. There are, according to an estimate, around 750 ayat in the Quran wherein nature in its different aspects has been invoked by God for conveying one or the other message to mankind.

After studying the Holy Quran, what one can conclude from eco-theological point of view with regard to different aspects of human life and its association with other forms of life on the earth is that the Holy Quran builds a holistic approach of education on the basis of three very important principles: The Principle of Unity, The Principle of Balance and The Principle of Responsibility, all discussed above with some detail. All these principles of the Quran aim at developing moderation in human conduct and behavior within and among themselves and with other forms of life under the sun also.

What the principle of unity in the Holy Quran shows is that “nature is a whole, a complete and complex system the components of which support and protect each other. If one of the components is affected, it disturbs the order and formal function of the entire system of nature”, argue Valentina-Mariana Manouiu, Madani Azzeddine and Ertan Duzgunes in their paper “Environmental Education in the Quran (2016). They further argue that:

“The billions of galaxies in the universe, the billions of creatures on Earth, everything that has ever been created, from the smallest particle of the atom and up to the biggest of galaxies, they are all part of a perfectly-created system where all the elements find themselves interdependent, influencing each other in a positive or negative way. Each being has its predestined function, which must remain undamaged and respected.... The Universe exists in perfect balance and proportion, both qualitatively and quantitatively” ().

In this regard, the following ayat of the Quran serve as guiding principle and beacon of Light. Allah says, “ Eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah, and do not go about acting wickedly on earth, spreading mischief (2:60)”; at another place, it is said, “ And to Madyan, we sent forth their brother Shoaib who exhorted them: O my people! Serve Allah, you have no god but Him. Indeed, a clear proof has come to you from your Lord. So give just weight and measure and diminish not to men their things and make no mischief on the earth after it has been set in good order” (7:85); at yet another place in The Quran, Allah says, “And know that we did not create the heavens and the earth and everything in between them for sport” (21:16); and, He says, “Believe in Allah and in His messenger and expend of what He has entrusted to you...” (57:7).

The study of the Quran makes it clear that it is the duty of man to respect environment, and also understand the fact that all the components of the Universe perform their role as man has been performing. Man, according to the Quran, has to act as a wise user of all the things and has to also perform the role of a protector; otherwise, non-compliance to this essential message would lead to imbalance and disaster on the earth. Allah has, in fact, time and again, shown and talked about the balance with which all the natural objects in the Universe perform their duties; there are scores of ayat that show natural objects as witnesses of Allah’s creative power and His balanced and systematic way of managing the Universe. It is to this effect that Allah says: “ The Sun is witness and the way it engulfs the world by light”(), and many more ayat of this category.

Going by the Principle of Unity, the Principle of Balance and the Principle of Responsibility that we find in the Quranic idea of the world, readers of the Quran may seek highly compassionate and enlightening guidance regarding environment in the Quranic ayat.

As man is not the master of the material and non-material resources found in the world, he is supposed to use the materials available on the earth responsibly and with due regard to principle of balance simply because his Creator and the ultimate Master of these resources commands him so. It would be in accordance with the Quranic spirit of teachings to state that man does not live in the world; he rather lives with the world while maintaining the Principle of Balance and acting on the Principle of Responsibility which Allah teaches him to follow again and again in the Quran. There are ayat which ask man to be just, compassionate and not to be a transgressor, oppressor and agent of anarchy under the sun. Such ayat are applicable to socio-economic and political aspects of human life and are equally applicable to conservation/preservation of environment and its responsible use.

It won’t be out of place to mention once again that the Quran is a book the sole objective of which is the education and emancipation of human soul. The moment one starts reading the Quran from this point of view, every single ayat of the Quran becomes light, source of guidance and a source of liberation. As the Quran calls man the vicegerent of Allah on the earth, this status demands a more responsible conduct and behavior from man not only among fellow human beings but also with other living organisms also. The vicegerent of Allah cannot act as a colonizer of fellow human beings and other forms of life as has been the tendency with tremendous scientific developments and inventions. Man as the vicegerent of Allah has to behave with the whole environment with compassion and moderation which the Quran emphasizes again and again in different contexts and situations.

As the references to natural objects and phenomenon abound in the Quran, it simply indicates that the Quran sees life in its varied forms as a whole and demands from man as the vicegerent a responsible and compassionate attitude towards all the things. The Quranic education offers the best wisdom and guidance regarding the maintenance of balance on the earth and outside the earth. Allah asks man “ wa la tuksiril mizan”(55:8-9) which

means “ Do not disturb the Principle of Balance” (55:8-9)); He further guides “ wa waza'l mizan”(55:7) which means “ He has put the system of balance in it”(55:7).

Considering the Principles of Unity, Balance and Responsibility as the guiding principles, the Quran through its teachings and guidance aims at dispelling the darkness of anarchy, disorder and instability under the sun.

Water in focus in Quran

There are in the Quran many ayat which talk about water as a “miraculous liquid” that is not only the base of all life under the sun but is also responsible for the sustenance of all the forms of life on the earth. Allah, the Almighty, has talked about water and its life-giving properties at many places in the Quran: for example, Allah says, “ And we sent down water from the heaven in proper quantity, and we made Earth its dwelling, and We are able to take it away” (23:18); at another place in the Quran, Allah says, “ In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the oceans for the benefit of mankind; in the water which Allah sent down from the Heavens and brought with it life to earth after being dead and gave life in it to every kind of land animal; and in directing the winds; and in the clouds that are enslaved between the heavens and the earth; all these are signs for a people who comprehend”(2:164); similarly at another place in the Quran Allah says, “Can't you see that Allah makes the clouds move gently, then makes them into a pile? Then you see rain come out from within? And then sends down from heaven mountains with ice inside them that strike whomever He wishes or miss whomever He wishes; its flash almost blinds you.”(24:43); at another place, Allah thus explains the miraculous functions of water, “ And you see the earth barren, but when we send down upon it rain, it quivers and swells and grows (something) of every beautiful kind” (22:5); at another place, Allah discusses water as a source of joy and happiness for the mankind in these words, “ And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy and We send down from the sky pure water” (11:7); about groundwater, springs, wells, lakes and other sources of water, Allah makes the following statements in the Quran: “ Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as springs and rivers in the earth” (39:2); And We have sent down rain from the sky in a measured amount and settled it in the earth. And, indeed, We are able to take it away” (25:48); similarly, having discussed water as the source of all forms of life under the sun, Allah goes on to state that all life on the earth has actually been emanated from water, “ Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?”(21:30).

Apart from these ayat of the Quran, there are other scores of ayat also that talk about water in different contexts. Needless to mention, Allah says that his arsh (throne) is also built upon water as He says, “ And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days-and His throne had been upon water-that He might test you as to who of you is best in deed....”(11:7).

If, on the one hand, it is important to note that the Quran has discussed water as a source of life, it is equally important to see, on the other hand, that the Quran has time and again in its message emphasized on the balances and responsible use of all of His blessings including water; therefore, the first part of this article invoked the three very important principles of the Quran with reference to environment as a whole: The Principle of Unity, The Principle of Balance and The Principle of Responsibility.

But for water what the earth would have been like?; therefore, Allah, wherever He mentions any of His blessings like water, air or different plants and animals or mountains, asks man to thank Him for everything and one of the ways of thanking Him would be to make a judicious and compassionate use of all the things from our environment including water.

Apart from being the source of life and its sustenance on the earth, water, according to the Quran, has a socio-religious function also. It purifies our bodies and clothes also; in the absence of purification of our bodies and clothes, a Muslim cannot offer and say the five-times mandatory prayers; in other words, water, by purifying our bodies and clothes, makes us fit for the spiritual development that is the top-most requirement of human beings for being suitable to the title of Vicegerent of God; and, it is through our spiritual development alone that humans beings can be capable of being compassionate, responsible, balanced, peaceful, stable and proportionate in their attitude and behavior towards other forms of life surrounding him on the earth.

In our world today, due to tremendous population explosion, industrialization, corporate invasion on natural habitats and resources and massive migration of human beings from place to place and the heavy transport facilities for the same, water resources are the biggest causality; biggest in the sense that if sources of water deplete and their condition worsens, it would simply amount to depletion and degeneration of life as a whole; therefore, human beings cannot afford but to be accountable and responsible with regard to water and its sources. Allah, the Almighty, states in Sura Ar-Rehman, “ So which of the blessings of your Lord would you go on falsifying”(55:13). This ayat has been repeated around fourteen times in this chapter and the question is, therefore, significant. Water, like other uncountable blessings of Allah, is one of the biggest blessings which if we go on misusing and abusing by our daily activities amounts to falsifying all the blessings of Allah, an act of disbelief which definitely earns us hellfire and punishment from the Lord of all these blessings.

CONCLUSION

The Quranic text is open for eco-theological reading; in fact, it is one of the oldest religious scriptures that offers profound principles for environmental education and sensitization in that direction. Islam, tawhid, the stewardship of man, the principles of balance, responsibility, trust, justice and ihsan are found in the Quran that could be read and interpreted from eco-theological point of view. There are more than five-hundred ayat in the Quran that describe and discuss the world of phenomenon including stars, mountains, trees, plants, animals, insects and birds so much so that they are even shown with consciousness of their own. The Quran entrusts man with the task of taking due care of the earth and all its inhabitants, living as well as non-living so that the balance of the planet could be maintained; any violation in this direction holds man accountable and makes him liable to severe punishment on the day of judgement. Everything in our eco-system is sacred and the whole earth is seen as a masjid in the Islamic tradition; therefore, the Quran asks man to see the things not from utilitarian point of view, rather with love, care and compassion so that his role as the steward of the earth stands justified. In short, the Quranic text offers a very rich data and theoretical insights that environmentalists across cultures and religious traditions can use for awareness and sensitization of people regarding environment and our responsibilities in that direction.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15379/ijmst.v9i2.3385>

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