

Islam and Environmental Development

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Abstract

The natural environment has suffered from man which requires human beings to better its conditions. There is a growing realization that the increasing deterioration of the environmental crisis that calls for serious examination. This is as a result of the power acquired by man through science and technology which is a major area to be examined. The paper adopts Ethico – Religious method in this study. The Islamic environmental world view is based on the five aims of Islamic legal system called the Shari’ah which aims to protect not only religion but life, mind, offspring and property. All of these are threatened by our lack of proper appreciation and protection of environment. Islam has environmental ethics that is different from other conventional environmental approaches, meaning that there is intrinsic value to God which is the integration of the universe. This view helps to deliver a more comprehensive and holistic approach of environment that is just as damaged to universe integrity and God’s verses. This approach makes humans to work towards conserving natural environment for present day. This paper therefore seeks to address what Islam has for environment and sustainable development. But will start by looking at the concept of environment and sustainable development before examining the Islamic views on this concept of environment and sustainable development before examining the Islamic views on these concepts. The paper concludes that the position of Islam on environment is based on the fact that Allah is the creator, sustainer and the owner of all creation humankind is the trustee on earth hence are accountable to Allah for his or her actions here on earth and towards other creatures. Every created thing has inherent values and utilization for

humankind both spiritual sustenance and material resource that drive development. The paper recommends that the involvement of humankind in any of these acts is considered as tyranny against nature and transgression of those rights. In totality the aim of both the conservation and development of the environment in Islam is for the universal good of all created beings, hence there must be a good plan for environmental development.

Keywords: Islam, Environment, Ethno-religious, Development and Sustainability

Introduction

Environmental global discourse has been things of discussion for a long time. This is because the natural environment has faced a lot of treatment by human to its condition but remains worst rather than improving. Human race has been fighting it for making better economic development. The power acquired by man in science and technology is a major threat to sustain ability of the environment, this threat can be best understood when we realize that human being has been seeing himself as idol. It is clear that human being in modern time does not have the proper and enough bridles for the behavior toward the natural environment. It has been observed that unknown changes in physical and natural environment and the incidence of environmentally harmful events over the last few decades have heightened the need for being aware about threats to the environment and its capacity to provide a sustainable life for human being and other creations, which hamper development. To this end, questions have been asked and doubts expressed about the environment capacity to continue enduring its exploited status.

There are some that believe that we cannot continue to use the goods of the world as in the past. Hence they deduced that human need to strike a more collective bargain over our behavior toward nature and scientific information about how much we damage the earth instead of improving it. Therefore, changes in human being behavior are necessary, hence the need for codes of conduct based on the ethics of the environment to correct the relationship between man and nature. Humans are faced with the dilemma of how to prevent over and depletion of natural resources when individual desire to maximize their gains. The noticeable

challenge however, is not how to live in accord with nature, but is in how to get subjects to agree on how to live in accord with nature.

Benson has it to say that “the literature on behavior and attitude studies about the roots of the environmental degradation is very limited. There is also a limited speech on historical root of the environment crisis that is related to ethics i.e. value, “ought to” and “ought not to toward nature”. It is not enough to mention the environmental lost and necessity for preservation, whereas there is not any regard to values and beliefs inform of most possible intensive philosophical and moral ones. Hence understanding ethics is of paramount importance in order to understand the crisis that afflicts society today and most scientist and environmental specialist believe that environment conservation is an important ethical matter.

Ethics actually is concerned about relations between individuals, but the ethic that regulates natural relations of human with the land, animals and plants (that is nature) is yet to exist. Though, the ethics concerning human and relations towards land, plants and animal remain an evolutionary opportunity and environmental necessity.

Islam, being one of the worldly religions does not leave the issue of environment un-discussed. Khlid has this to say,

Islam provides a holistic approach to existence. There is not different between the sacred and the secular and has not placed a distinction between the world of mankind and the world of nature. More importantly, Islam encourages people to protect earth and all life on it and maintain the balance in nature as created by God. We live, however, in a world of pollution, deforestation climate change and desertification, and in this world environmental concerns are often forgotten in favour of economic benefit.

There are several reasons for the attention to environment ethics. One reason can be found in this reality that ethical guidelines and world views can have significant influence on individual and collective behaviors. Secondly, environmental beliefs

or worldviews as underlying a system of attitude and beliefs about human-nature, relationships determine behavior is used when interacting with the environment. Hence, this paper aim to provide an overview of fundamentals and common approaches of environmental ethics that is geared towards development from Islamic perspective.

Concept of Environment

Environment is the circumstances or conditions that surround ones surroundings. It is the totality of circumstances surrounding an organism or group of organisms, especially, the combination of external physical condition that affects and influences the growth, development, and survival of organisms, the complex of social and cultural conditions affecting the nature of an individual or community. Environment means what surrounds a thing or an item according to answers. This could be natural environment – air conditions, water, lands, atmosphere etc. It could also be human environment – people surrounding the item or things. This is also known as social environment which includes elements such as spiritual environment, emotional environment, home, family etc.

Makinde quoting Aliyu asserts that environment is the whole sum of the surrounding external conditions with which an organism, a community or an object exists.

Environmental Ethics Approach

With regards to environmental ethics two questions abound namely, questions about “Centre of value” and Basis of evolutions” it is possible to distinguish a spectrum of approaches in which the types of right and wrong behavior towards the natural environment are defined. These approaches should be considered as manifestation of efforts to expand moral standing to nature and non-human world. Common among these approaches are conservationism, preservationists, social ecology, animal rights, land ethic, deep ecology, eco-feminism, stewardships, sustainable development and sustainability.

According to Brennan A; and Teuk – Size Lo, conservatism and preservationist are often associated with resources. Resources has generally been described as a set of utilitarian ethic, which sees the maximization of human welfare as the basis of

good action. It includes all ethical positions, which see nature as a vast resources reservoir for human use. In conservationism, various compounds of the environment need to be protected only when or because they have known economic value. Conservationism is thus guided by cost benefit analysis and market imperatives. Preservationists unlike conservationism rejects strict economic valuation of nature. This ethical position prescribes natural preservation for the purpose of ensuring diversity of species and for maintaining beautiful natural system.

Social ecology emphasizes present ecological problems and these problems cannot be clearly understood, much less resolved without resolutely dealing with problems within society. Social ecology informs us that nature and society are interlinked by evolution into one nature that consists of two differentiations: First or butic nature and second or human alienation from nature by employing the instrument of critical theory. According to this view, alienation is caused by a narrow positivist conception of rationality as an instrument for pursuing power, which critical theories would replace or reconcile with the aesthetic, moral, sensual and expressive aspects of human nature.

Animal Right Attaches Intrinsic Value to Life

This ethical view propounds whether we should respect animals and what kinds of animals should be possessed in respect and ethical consideration. Some environmental ethicists suggest that the notion of rights and dallies should be extended to the animal or biological kingdom. Supporters of animal right argue that, like humans, some non-human animals have consciousness or self-awareness and capacity for reasoning. They with defending of ethical rights of some animals have believed that fault should be found in the system which allows seeing animals like resources for us, whereas animals have rights as same humans.

The Holy Qur'an says: "There is no animal or a birth that flies on its wings but forms part of communities like you (Q6:38).

By virtue of being the vicegerent of Allah on earth, man is the custodian of nature. He made all other creatures subservient to man. This is confirmed in the Holy Qur'an (22:36)

And the camels, we have made them of the signs appointed by Allah for you therein is much good. So, mention the name of Allah on them standing in a row. Then why they fall down on their sides eat of them and feed the contented one a beggar. Thus, we have made them subservient to you that you may be grateful. Therefore, are behooves man to take care of the lower beings in his care by upholding and preserving the signs of Allah

All living species of plants and animals that are found in the wild environment are regarded as wild. They are found in the thick forest like the rainforest and in the grassland. They include species like Lion, Zebra, Giraffe, Leopard, Elephant and some species of birds. Presently, wild population is fast in the decline due to high rate of poaching for pure economic reasons. Men have hunted wild life into extinction, in a bid to use the animal skin for making leather and fabrics or tusk for ornaments.

Islamic View on Animals

The preservation of animals is an ordained practice in Islam since the time of prophet Nuhu, when the Almighty Allah, commanded him to take along with him in his ark one pair of each animal (Q11:40). The population of animals from that period would have greatly increased, if not for the fact that men have devised several wicked methods of catching wild animals and their young ones. The Holy Prophet Muhammad forbade cruelty to animals when he said: "If you must kill an animal, kill without torture.

Some sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad enjoining Muslims to show kindness to animals and hence preserve them include the following:

The Holy Prophet Muhammad forbade inciting animals to fight each other. A party of men tied up a hen and was shooting arrows at it. Ibn Umar passed by them angrily. Who has done this? Certainly, the Holy Prophet had forbidden this kind of thing (Muslim, Hadith 48:13).

The Prophet further said:

A prostitute was forgiven by Allah because passing by a painting dog near a well and seeing that the dog was about to die of thirst, she took off her shoe and trying it with her scarf, she drew out some water for the dog, so Allah forgave her .

From the quotation above, Islam regards the animal kingdom as a community that must be nurtured and preserved kindness to animals of utmost concern to Islam, and Muslims are enjoined to forsake using animals as games, a practice regarded as the devil's work (Q5:90)

Land ethic states that we need not to act upon conscience between people, but the problem is the need to generalize conscience from individuals to land in this approach, the role of Homo Sapiens changes from conqueror of the land community to plan member and citizen of it. It implies respect for the community as such.

The land ethic enlarged the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals or collectively the land in land ethic view, a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

Deep ecology separates all efforts to environmental preservation in two distinct of shallow and deep movement categories.

Former movement aims to preserve environment and first against pollution and dissipation of resources for make an increase in health and affluence of people in the developed countries. Deep ecology claims that it is more useful than shallow ecology and accepted than move towards deep ecology is an obligation. This ecology principle reject human domination over nature bio-spherical, egalitarianism, biodiversity and co-existence anti-class posture, fight against pollution and resources dissipation and also local autonym and decentralization. Deep ecology seeks self-realization through unity with other things and claimed that an individual can form unity by species ecosystems and landscapes.

Self-realization at end of its ultimate perfection, means see identification in diversity that can be compared with alienation.

Niger Delta Experience

The Niger Delta is the world's third largest wetland, after Holland and Mississippi, and the world's biggest remaining mangrove. It is the site of most of Nigerian biodiversity and also the area where the main oil reserves are found. It comprises nine of the thirty six states which make up Nigeria.

Oil was first found in commercial quantities at Olobiri in 1956. The main multinational oil companies in the region today are Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Mobil Chevron, Agip, Elf and Texaco. There are lots of illegal refineries in the Rivers State that affects native, air, water, human being and animal. Land cannot yield to its capacity, fisher men hardly get fish except those in the Atlantic. Lives are lost every day because of this illegal refinery and bunkry. The air is polluted, water and general environment. The outcome of this is soot all over Niger Delta, Rivers state in particular.

These are deliberate action by man to cause crisis in the environment.

From the view of Islam, God gave us this thing called environment, and must be properly taken care by man (individuals and community). This more reason why article 3 of Islamic declaration on sustainable development states that individuals are bound to take care of it as to promote its national resources, including air, climate, water, seas, flora and fauna, and refrain from any act likely to cause pollution or damage the eco system or disturb the balance thereof .

In an Islamic perspective, the concept of human needs is based on the principles that all the individual component of the surroundings were created by Allah, and human being has but two basic needs spiritual need, belief or faith in Allah and physical need which is achieved by making proper use of the resources created by Allah and given to man free. Everything God created was in order and still as He created them. It's on this note that one should know that Islamic concept of environment has to do with protection of human beings, animals, plants, land, water and air.

Feminism and Ecology

Ecofeminism considers connections between feminism and ecology. It sees the theme of dominance operating in the relationships of man over women and humanity over nature. Islam gives women a place of prominence. The Beijing conference on women empowerment, September 1995, was an exercise in fulfillment of the Islamic recognition of the state and role of women in the society. Women are very important in nature. Without women, continuity in nature would be highly impossible. In civilized societies, women have the same rights and privileges as men. Owing to their feminine nature, they are however not subjected to the same laws and discipline as men. In nature, every form of flora and continuity of the species, the interdependence of the feminine in nature is also recognized in the lower forms. Women are the mothers of nations. They are close to nature and their male counterparts. In this regard, the involvement in the environment carries a far-reaching consequence, worthy of notice.

One of the vital roles of women is the regenerative role they play in nature. Women nurse their children at birth and play a similar role in old age. Because of the feminine nature of women, they seem to be more sympathetic and attentive to problems of others. Islam regards women first and foremost as equal partners to men. This is because previous cultures had underplayed the status of women. Men and women were created equally.

People keep your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from there to many men and women (Q 4:1)

As equal partners, Almighty Allah places love and compassion in between conflicting roles.

And of his signs is that he created mates for you from yourselves that you might find quite of mind on them, and He put between you love and compassion. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect (Q30:21).

The concept of Islam on women and nature can be deduced from the verses above, as that of equal partners in both the social and physical aspects of life women have greater role to play in the conservation of nature. Being closer to nature than men, women groups should appeal to the authorities in territories to reduce the quantity of wood made available for firewood. The use of fuel-wood is very common in rural communities and in other communities where the level of poverty is high. Much as Islam allows equal rights to women, they need to be adequately educated, to be able to assert their right and put their knowledge to the advantage of their environment. Prophet Muhammad recognized the essence of educating women he said:

Educate one man you have educated one person. But educate a woman and you have educate a woman and you have educated a whole generation
(Bukhari & Muslim).

From the above statement one sees that any act or culture that prevents women from being educated is un-Islamic. Hence an environmentally educated woman would play a key role in reaching a wider audience; when it comes to environmental literacy. Again, Islam informs us of the meekness and gentles of women in treating animally. All animals, whether wild or domesticated are safe with women; A world of women will therefore be replete with species of different animals. In order to maintain the present animal population in each community, women group should appeal to their spouses and indeed government.

Women despite their closeness to nature have not improved the quality of environment sanitation and in their localities. Women both home and in commerce generate the largest volume of domestic waste that accumulates in the neighborhood. Islam has unequivocally spoken against waste generation as Muslim women must attend to their adornment before prayers daily.

Stewardship

Stewardship emphasizes on human steward toward all God's creations and perseveration of them. Many believe that earth and its resources are from God. This ethical approach confirms this besides it also argues that we are not landlord

of the earth and our domination over earth has not been absolute yet, rather we have only been given the responsibility to take care of all creations. As stewards, we are called to rule creation “in holiness and wisdom” as God would and when we fail to do so, the earth suffers.

In stewardship, human take responsibility for conserving resources which are being used every day. This responsibility causes human to use natural resources in a sustainable way in which others (humans and non-humans) are able to use needful resources.

While the concepts of “*sustainable development*” and “*sustainability*” are not typically considered ethical approach they could be described in these terms. Sustainability can be considered as international interdisciplinary goals which should involve intergeneration equity; sustainable development is anthropocentric, because it advocates the use of scientific and technological power in the name of sustainability, informed by an instrument view of nature then maintains the ontological distinction between people and nature.

Religious Value Orientation

Separation between worldly living and religion is viewed by many as the main root of environmental crisis. Admittedly, religions help to shape our attitudes toward nature. They also suggest ways to follow as a guide how humans can treat other humans and how we should relate to nature. Thus, religions shape world views and ethics which underline fundamental attitudes and values of different cultures and societies. Religious values and ethical beliefs form behavior toward others, including our relationship with all creatures like plant and animal life.

Therefore, some totally believe that environmental crisis is indeed a religious or moral one of which returns back to religious tradition is the main solution. New science and technology has helped religion with regard to environmental preservation. For instance Nasr believes that there is no sensible link between science and ethics. More so, current ethics, mostly Christian, is compatible with world view of the new science in present new world.

Under these circumstances, the result can be seen in environmental crisis whereas dominant scientific world view could not produce satisfactory result and all efforts to formulate proper environmental ethics have little effect on preventing the environment from being damaged.

Since two decades, worldview point has changed, and religions are considered effective in solving environmental problems. Proofs show that people are willing to abide with religious principles and teachings than the past. There is need therefore to evaluate religious teachings as to detect among religions, which is actually chasing environmental crisis by its ethic. This takes us to another Centre of value "Theo-centrism" Theo-centrism is a God-centered approach to the world. It comes from those religions that believe in only one God as Centre of and creation and sustainer of the earth such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

In Islam like Christianity and Judaism, taking care of the environment is a matter of concern. However, some believe that these religions are important and anthropocentric and view nature as a being of secondary importance. Proponents of these religions might say that the particular attributes of human do indeed place him/her on different plane from other creatures, but this gives human a separate and special responsibility toward the natural environment through responsibility in the direction of God. Such responsibility will not certainly ignore possible consequences for other living organism in decision making for the environment.

Furthermore, there are rich resources for rethinking view of a nature in thee convened tradition in the vice-regency concept of the Qur'an the sacrament theology of the Hebrew Bible and in incarnation Christianity. In Islam the true owner is God and anything owes its existence to him. Besides human behavior towards the natural environment is evaluated based on the following God's command and as a result, the Centre of value in Islam is directly related to theo-centrism. Hence intrinsic value belongs to God and values of other things are being defined in relation to Him. Then all lives and inanimate things possess value and human is then responsible for taking care of nature and its components.

This means that the evaluation criteria for an act can be defined by deontology. Human action is ethically right when she/he does his/her duty just according to

God's commands. Behavior toward nature based on divine command is a clear case in Islam in which human are asked to regard the environment. Hence human behavior toward the natural environment can be evaluated based on such commands.

The Islamic world view is characterized by a specific attribute of the centrality in which God encompasses everything. Based in this concept explaining environmental ethics can establish a more comprehensive ethical approach for human nature interaction (Gospel image) in the Qur'an confirmed this reality. For example, and whatever in the heavens and is in the earth is Allah's and Allah encompasses all things (Q 4: 126).

The relationship between God, human and nature, it is useful to mention O.R. Ordan's ideas, he suggested two major world views about environmentalism that include intervention mode or techno-centrism in which human ingenuity and the spirit of competition dictate the terms of morality and nurturing mode or a metaphor for morality (how to behave).

Conclusion

Human nature relation should be re-defined to establish a more well-intentioned and harmonious one. In this regard ethics exposes those actions of man that afflicts society today. For scientist and a large number of environmentalist nature conservation is a major ethical issue and human kind's way of life need to be reversed by changing to meet the required standard aim at conserving the natural environment. The need for proper ethics to return back to the right human relation is of utmost importance.

There are approaches to environmental ethics. Some of these approaches when looked at, exist just to attach intrinsic value only to humans. They only satisfy human needs alone. On their hands, some approaches can be identified in which all creations along with non-human world possess intrinsic value and thus human should hold them in reverence in spite of any utility that they might have for humankind. Nevertheless, there is still an urgent need for a comprehensive and holistic approach for a comprehensive ethics which prepares possibility to make

human being limit his/her unlimited material desires on a voluntary basis for a better living condition.

Responses to the two basic questions of environmental ethics from Islamic view is completely differed from other conventional environmental ethics approaches. This response is based on ethnocentricity and theological deontology respectively. The natural environment is viewed by Islam in a specific perspective in which God means the universe interaction. This view help to deliver a more comprehensive and holistic approach of environment is just as damaged to universe integrity and Gods verses. This approach is appropriate in the sense that it make human to work toward conserving natural environment for present day.

Recommendation

To ascertain that God's created environment is for the good of both human being and animals the Government of the day should checkmate the damage done to earth by discouraging deforestation by law.

Second the amount of illegal activities in the Niger Delta region should be discouraged because it tells on the health of its citizens. Government should create employment for young graduates or engage them or empower them which could be seen encouraging entrepreneurship as to curb with this. Above all, enact a law that can checkmate excesses.

Endnotes

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