Towards A Green World: an Islamic Perspective

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Received: 2018-07-18; Accepted 2018-08-12,

Abstract:
The state of world environment and natural resources are in disastrous condition in today's global village. Most of the components of ecosystems are looming in the manner that apparently seems to have gone almost beyond human control. Environmental issues thus have become a matter of urgent and utter concern for the policy makers of both North and South, international organizations, development partners, practitioners, academicians and civil society. At this perilous condition, for which human race is the sole responsible, what else actually remains to thwart the crawling catastrophe and get back the livable environment? Keeping this question in the forefront, this paper seeks to delve into the state of current environmental crises and scarcities, review mainstream and Islamic understanding of the issues and extract policy directives from Islamic worldview.

Key words: Green World, Islamic Ideology, Environment, Ecosystem, Islamic Ecotheology, Water, Air, Land, Scientific method; etc.

Objectives of the study:
1. To find out the similarities and distinctions between mainstream and Islamic ideology on global ecology.
2. To know the degree, impact and causes of ecological imbalance of the world and Islamic ideology to overcome the crisis.

Methodology of the study:
The research has been conducted on the basis of secondary data; and data connected to the topic to support and direct the research. The search of data was mainly conducting on the relevant reports and statistics published by the concern authority, journal databases, websites and text books. In referring data from the secondary sources, regency of data, cause of publishing the data, reliability and acceptance of the publisher, method of data collection they used has been carefully considered.

Review of the Literature:
Green World is a literary concept defined by the critic Northrop Frye in his book, Anatomy of Criticism (1957). Frye defines this term using Shakespeare's romantic comedies as the foundation. In Anatomy of Criticism, Frye describes the Green World as "the archetypal function of literature in visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from "reality," but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate(1). The plots of these comedies often follow the formula of action starting in the normal world and then progressing to an
alternate one in which the conflict is resolved before returning to the normal world. The plot of the Shakespearean romantic comedy is built upon the tradition established by the medieval "season ritual-play". The plots of which thematically deal with the triumph of love over the wasteland. The concept of the Green World is used to contrast the civilized world of man with the natural, often harsh, natural world.

As noted in Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, the "drama of the green world" is embodied in the works of William Shakespeare (2). The thematic tones of the plays contain the overarching appearance of humanity eclipsing the natural worlds displayed. A Midsummer Night's Dream serves as an exploration of the green world through the fairies' interference in the romantic entanglement of the Athenian lovers. The majority of the play's action takes place in the woods outside of Theseus' Athens, with Shakespeare primarily using Athens to frame the narrative in civilization. The woods of A Midsummer Night's Dream serves as an analogy to a dream-like world created out of our desire that serves to contrast the "stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience" (1).

In the more urban setting of Romeo and Juliet, the green world becomes associated with the intimacy of romantic emotion and is notable in its "protracted absences." (4) Romeo journeys in solitary walks into the woods surrounding Verona to lament his ill-fated romance with Rosaline and remove him from a world occupied by more human matters. (4) As You Like It, also contains considerable references to the green world. The Forest of Arden is both idealized through the usage of pastoral terms, but is also depicted in a way that shows how humans manipulate and exploit it. While the play makes use of typical pastoral motifs in describing the forest, these are often juxtaposed with images of the wood as a wild place—showing a dialectic tension between the new inhabitants and long standing forest (5).

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, also exhibits signs of the literary green world. The comedy's protagonist, Valentine, enters the woods and shortly becomes the leader of a band of outlaws; afterwards, however, the other characters all venture out into the forest and become converted. As Frye notes using this example: "...the action of the comedy begins in a world represented by as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world" (4). In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Green Knight is completely green, right down to his skin: he is "nature anthropomorphized" (6). He challenges King Arthur's court by accusing them of being too indulgent rather than courageous. Sir Gawain must travel through winter's brutal conditions to arrive at Bertilak's court, which is described [by... ] as the "antithesis of winter". Despite Sir Gawain being attacked by "unnamed giants," it is made clear that the greatest threat to his survival is the harsh winter landscape as made evident in line 726 of the poem.

Introduction:

Human being is dependent on environment or environmentally speaking on biosphere as it provides him with all the necessities for his sustenance, growth and development. But in much less than a thousand years, humanity has brought the biosphere - the giver of products essential for life, living space, quality-of-life, variety-of-life and national economies - to crisis point. The biosphere is now giving us many signals that it is greatly stressed; that it is struggling to cope with natural resource depletion, ozone depletion, acid rain, ecosystem loss, polluted air, land, rivers and oceans. Yet our future depends on it. Apart from the daunting environmental crises; preliminary research on environment indicates even the scarcities of critical environmental resources -especially of cropland, freshwater, and forests that contribute to violence in many parts of the world. A statistics shows that in 1900, when the world's human population was about 1.65 billion, its annual growth was around 10 million; today, with a base of about 6.0 billion, the annual growth is about 80 million (2). The fourfold increase in total world population since 1900 has combined with much higher per capita consumption of materials and energy to produce huge jurrups in global energy consumption, carbon emissions, water use, fish consumption, land degradation, and deforestation.
These environmental crises and scarcities usually do not cause wars among countries, but they can generate severe social stresses within countries, helping to stimulate sub national insurgenies, ethnic clashes, and urban unrest (3). Such civil violence particularly affects developing societies, because they are, in general, highly dependent on environmental resources and less able to buffer themselves from the social crises that environmental scarcities cause. So, if humanity along with the rest of biodiversity in the biosphere is to have a sustainable future and reasonable quality of life, we need to start thinking and experimenting with comparably large-scale planning and adaptive management of human natural resource use and replenishment. This article makes a humble venture to look and evaluate the two-fold environmental problems -environmental crises and scarcities from Islamic point of view and also attempts to extract the policy directives emanating from Islamic jurisprudence.

Findings of the Study:
Environment Mainstream and Islamic Worldview:
Environment is the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival (4). G T Miller, in his book, Living in the Environment, writes: "The term 'environment' refers to all external conditions and factors that affect living organism. Here external factors mean all the things around us such as - air, water, light, animals, humans etc.

Interestingly, however, Islamic worldview of environmentalism takes a place 'in between' the above-mentioned two dominant worldviews. Islam rather combines these two worldviews in a single melting pot though it was developed fourteen hundred years before. Islam is considered a comprehensive way of life whose teachings cover, directly or indirectly, every possible human relationship including that with the environment. These teachings are primarily available in the revealed knowledge which comprises the Quran and the Sunnah. There remains two other sources, namely the Ijma’ and Qiyas; they are dependent on the first two in different ways and degrees. In what follows, some of the verses that define the epistemological parameters of the Quran are considered. One verse, at the beginning of Surat Al-Bagarah, presents the Quran as a book of guidance.

In addition, he Quran announces that Islam, as a 'gift of God' to mankind. Islam is a universal religion and its concern for the environment is a universal one, cutting across national, religious and geographical barriers. Its major commandments are directed, not to the Muslims alone, but to the human race. Hence in the question of conserving the natural resources the Almighty Allah's decree is enforced upon 'people' rather than to Arab or Muslims alone. The environmental worldview in Islam is a holistic one: it assumes a fundamental link and interdependency between all natural elements and bases its teachings on the premise that if man abuses or exhausts one element, the natural world as a whole will suffer direct consequences. This belief is nowhere formulated in one concise phrase; it is rather an underlying principle that forms the foundation of the Quranic teachings (8).

In the Quranic view, nature is an estate belonging to Allah and it has been given to man merely as a trust. Nature constitutes a testing-ground for man's morality and whatever right man possesses to have dominion over nature is solely due to his make-up and solidly derives from God's trust in His deputy on earth. These three central concepts of Islam: Tawhid (Unity), khilifa (stewardship) and Amana (trust) (9). Tawhid, the oneness of God, is a
cornerstone of the Islamic faith. It recognizes the fact that there is one absolute Creator and that man is responsible to Him for all his actions. It is mentioned in the Quran: "To God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth, for God encompasses everything" (7).

**Environmental Ethics and Islamic Ecotheology**

Environmental ethics is the product of a set of beliefs, values and behaviors which help preserve the ecological integrity of the Earth. It is both culture and religion specific and is transmitted from generation to generation through a variety of channels, including formal, informal and other mode of education and learning.

Environmental ethics imposes certain limitations on human conduct with regard to nature. The limitations often take the form of principles, compliance to which is voluntary. Some of these limitations are encoded into laws whose compliance is obligatory and their violation incurs punishment.'

These environmental ethics, practically speaking, no matter whether it is voluntary or obligatory, adopted in developed or developing countries are often blithely neglected that leads the nature in sheer peril. In the environmental debate it has often been argued that what is really needed to solve the present ecological crisis is environmental ethics. Such ecoethics would provide guidelines towards "right" and "wrong" actions and attitudes towards nature. In general, most ecoethics presented are extensions of social ethics, i.e. ethics that also include nature and the organisms inhabiting it as moral objects. These ethics aim at giving nature some 'intrinsic' value, independent of human utility and appreciation. In Islamic worldview, mere guidelines of "right" and "wrong" action regarding environment are not sufficient to protect nature from irreparable crises until these guidelines are sincerely inculcated with the notions of Tawhid (Unity), khilifa (stewardship) and Anima (trust) mentioned earlier (10).

However, the Islamic ecotheology has many spokesmen; the most prominent perhaps being Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mawil Izzi Dien, Fib'a is considered to be the natural state of man in harmony with nature, according to the Islamic ecotheology. The argument that people must "return" to another way of living with an understanding of the interconnectedness of everything in nature, has been proposed by environmentalists. Fitra is an idea compatible with this argument. In Quran we read that the earth is created for man, to be used by him. God has made nature subservient (sakhkhara) to man, which gives the human being the potential to abuse nature. However, every natural phenomenon is subjected to man, independent whether or not man can exercise power over it such as the sun and the moon (14). This relationship between man and nature is the will of God, but also a test of man's gratitude towards God.

Material needs of man such as eating, drinking, clothing and dwellings are all mentioned in the Quran (15). Nature as protection is a gift from God and nature is thus the testing ground for the gratitude towards God. Human beings are allowed to use natural resources and cultivate the land.

**Purposeful creation:**

According to Islam, the Universe has been created by Allah with a purpose and for an appointed term. 6 It is mentioned in the Quran:

"(and ) who remember God when they stand, and when they sit, and when they lie down to sleep, and (thus) reflect on the creation of the haevens and the earth: "O our Sustainer! Thou hast not created (aught of) this without meaning and purpose..." (3:191)

Man has been given dominion over the rest of the creation; Allah has granted humankind the care of all sources of life and resource of nature. The utilization of natural resources, according to Islam, is a sacred trust invested in mankind. Hence man
should take every precaution to ensure the interests and rights of other living beings, since he is the Kahlifah (vicegerent) of Allah on earth.

Muslims are called Ummatan Wasatan, the Ummah (community) which does not leave the golden middle path, avoids excesses and practices moderation. Therefore, Islamic principles of environment and development originate from an organic whole, in which all the constituents have their due position in relation to each other. This holistic approach also applies to environment and development.

**Nature is a 'Gift of God':**

Nature is indeed a bounty of Allah that makes the humanity and all other living organisms survive in the earth. The Quran gives a clear indication in this respect:

"And He has made subservient to you, (as a gift) from Himself, all that is in the heavens and on earth: in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think!" (45:13)

Commenting on this verse Mohammad Asad writes: "by endowing man, alone among all living being, with a creative mind and thus, with the ability to make conscious use of the nature that surrounds him and is within him."

However, Faruqi and Faruqi write in this connection: "Its (nature's) goodness is derived from that of the divine purpose. For the Muslim, nature is ni'mah, a blessed gift of Allah's bounty... to transform in any way with the aim of achieving ethical value... since nature is Allah's work, His ayah or signs, and the instrument of His purpose which is absolute good, nature enjoys in the Muslim's eye a tremendous dignity(11).

**Nature manifests the 'Signs' of Allah:**

According to Islam, Nature is the creation of Allah that bears clear manifestation of the Ayah or signs of Allah. Nature plays a cognitive role in Islam as the word Ayah means both a natural phenomenon and a verse in the Quran, i.e. the word of God is a natural sign, and the natural sign a word from God. Man is encouraged to use his senses to discover the signs from God in nature, which can be exemplified with the following verses:

"And Allah sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death: Verily in this is a Sign (ayah) for those who listen. And verily cattle too will ye find an instructive Sign. From what is within their bodies, between excretions and blood, We produce, for your drink, milk, pure and agreeable to those who drink it. And from the fruit of the date palm and the vine, ye get out wholesome drink and food: behold, in this also a Sign for those who are wise. And thy Lord taught the bee to build its cells in hills, on trees, and in men's habitations; Then to eat of all the produce of the earth, and find with skill the spacious paths of its Lord; there issues from within their bodies a drink of varying colours, wherein is healing for men. Verily in this is a Sign for those who give thought." (16:65-69)

**In another verse the Quran speaks:**

"Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon: [hence,] adore not the sun or the moon, but prostrate yourselves in adoration before God, who has created them - if is is Him whom you (really) worship." (41:37)

Here in this verse, the day and night and sun and moon are considered as the 'signs' of Allah. Human beings are the 'trustee' of nature. Man, according to Islam, has been given clear guidelines not to destroy the environment because he is not its owner. Islam also forbids cruelty to animals and bird. It holds man responsible for the well-being of other creation. In other words, the attitude of Islam to the environment, the sources of life and the resources of nature is a positive one, in as much as it is based on protection and prohibition.
Protection of environment is a sacred duty and rewarding job:

Being the trustee of nature, it is humans’ sacred duty to conserve nature and protect environment from degradation of any kind. Allah has created everything and nothing is created in vain. It is mentioned in the Quran:

"We have not created the heaven and the earth and all that lies between then in vain." (38:27)

The protection of Allah's creation is therefore the duty of a Muslim and Allah appreciates those with rewards who take care of environment. It is these values which led the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) to say,

"Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it, until it matures and bears fruit, is rewarded."  

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) also said:

"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field and men and beasts and birds eat from it, all of it is charity on his part".  

True environmental consciousness is born when such values are adopted and become an intrinsic part of our mantle and physical make-up. In his letter of recommendation, the First Caliph, Abu Bakr ordered his troops,

"Do not cut down a tree, do not abuse a river, do not harm animals and be always kind and humane to God's creation, even to your enemies."  

The Muslim commitment to the sanctity of life is most clearly seen during the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Makkah, where the pilgrims are not permitted even to kill an insect nor can pluck any leaves of tree while in Ihram.

Preservation, not profligation:

Protecting the environment from detriments of all kinds and preserving the nature is the philosophy of Islamic environmentalism. Being the trustee of the nature, this is humans duty to take care of environmental sustainability (12). Along with proper care of environment, Islam also cautions not to be profligate and wasteful. Allah gives order to humankind:

"0 Children of Adam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship, and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful!" (7:31)

Almost in the same manner, it is mentioned in another verse:

"And do not waste [God's bounties]: verily, He does not love the wasteful!" (6:141)

The significance of the issue becomes clearer while the wasteful person is bordered on with the Satan. The holy Quran declares:

"Behold, the squanderers are, indeed, of the ilk of the satans -inasmuch as Satan has indeed proved most ungrateful to his Sustainer" (8).

Commenting on this verse, Mohammad Asad writes: "Squandering implies an utter lack of gratitude for the gift of Sustenance bestowed by God upon man; the squanderers are described as being `of the ilk (lit. "brethren") of the satans"(10).

However, the importance of preserving natural resources and refraining from wasteful acts is also found in this history of the Caliphs. Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam issued the following instructions to Ziyad bin Abiya, the Governor of Fars: "...Treat the path of moderation and do not waste public funds. Today remember your tomorrow. Spend only as much as is absolutely necessary. Whatever is surplus save it for a rainy day? Do not be arrogant. Do you think God would reward you for humility when you are arrogant? When you roll in luxury you will not be rewarded for poverty. A man is rewarded only for his accomplishment. One reaps what he sows"(20).

Cleanliness, purification and waste management:

Islam has created a bond between faith and cleanliness, rendering the latter as a part of creed.
The Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) said: "Faith is some seventy branches, the highest of which is "There is no god but God", and the least is removing obstacles from the path of people, and that shyness is a branch of faith" (18)

It is obvious that clearing the path means, in this context, the removal of material obstacles or solid waste which constitutes a kind of pollution. Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Beware of the two [acts that bring] curses: relieving oneself in the path of people, or in the shade [i.e. where they usually rest] (16). The concept is reiterated in another Hadith which, in addition to the above two prohibitions, it mentions the prohibition of relieving oneself in water sources (e.g. ponds, rivers...etc)(14). The prohibition of these two Hadiths is intended to prevent pollution in the language of today. The direct human polluting activity at the time is extended to indirect sources of pollution, such as through sewers. The natural pollutants of the time are extended to include the chemical pollutants. Chemicals such as pesticides, insecticides, herbicides...etc., are detrimental to human health and much of these chemicals reach aquifers causing serious damages to both humans and aquatic organisms. Thus, by analogy, keeping the above-mentioned two hadiths in modern day context, Mustafa Abu-Sway comments the dumping of nefarious chemicals in the water sources to be prohibited(9).

The Sharia aims at protecting the environment, and while the individual is asked to help in this respect, the ultimate responsibility is in the hands of the state. When Abu Musa went to Basrah as governor of the city, he called the inhabitants to a meeting and addressed them: "The Amir al-Muminin, Umar, has sent me to you to teach you the Book of your Lord and the Sunnah of His Prophet and to clean your streets for you." People were taken aback when they heard these words. They could easily understand that one of the responsibilities of a Muslim ruler was to instruct people in their religion. However, that one of his duties should be to clean streets was something new and surprising to them. 28 The function of the governor who represents the authority, in the narration about Abu Musa, includes keeping the environment clean. This position should be highlighted, because it challenges the authority to deliver sound policies regarding the environment and to implement them(19). However, this issue is further testified by another hadith:

Sa'îd ibn al-M sayyib was heard saying: "Allah is Good and likes what is fraught; he is Clean and likes cleanliness; he is Generous and likes generosity; he is Munificent and likes munificence. So clean (I think he said, your courtyards), and do not imitate the Jews." I mentioned that to Muhajir ibn Mismar and he said he had been old by Amir ibn Sa'd, on his father's authority, that the Prophet had said something similar, but he said, "Cleanse your courtyards."

Ecosystems: Crisis and Values:

Ecosystems usually refer to the community of different species interacting with one another and with the chemical and physical factors making up its nonliving environment. Everything in the biosphere that affects the environment is the components of ecosystems. A modest attempt will be made in the following to review the current status of major ecosystems that affect living organisms along with a brief account of the Quran and the Sunnah regarding these ecosystems, its values-orientation and protective standpoint.

Air:

The atmosphere that surrounds the Earth consists of a mixture of gases, primarily nitrogen and oxygen is commonly called as air. The composition of nitrogen and oxygen is 78% and 21% respectively by volume that surrounds the Earth with a stable mass of about 1 kg/cm (14 lb/in) of Earth surface. 29 It is presumed by the natural science that the ratio of oxygen, if increases more than 21 %
would mean burning of all the woods and papers due to a slight fire, and its reduction would mean difficult breathing by humans and animals. Thus, Air has attained a significant position in Islam and is considered as the sign (ayah) of Allah. It is mentioned in the Quran:

"Among His signs is this, that He sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, giving you a taste of His Grace and Mercy, that the ships may sail majestically by His command and that you (men) may seek of His Bounty in order that yoLi may be grateful” (14).

The taste of God's mercy, through wind, is that it cools down and purifies the atmosphere, and brings the blessings of rains, which fertilize the soil and help international commerce and intercourse among men, through sea-ways and air-ways. The wind plays an important role in sucking up the moisture from terrestrial water, carrying it about in dark clouds as needed, and breaking it up with rain as needed. The Quran speaks in this respect:

"It is Allah Who sends the winds to raise the clouds, then He spreads them in the sky and breaks them into fragments as He pleases, then you see raindrops falling from their midst.” (30:48)

Thus, air is indeed a great bounty of Allah and placed a higher status in Islam without which sustenance of humanity is simply impossible. The Quran speaks in this respect:

Data for 1995 show the current concentrations of CO2 are "higher than at any time in the past 150,000 years. This increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, consequently, is contributing global warming. The natural carbon cycle is altered by fossil fuel burning (automobiles, power plants, industry, and heating being the most common fossil fuel burning activities), which releases CO2 into the atmosphere. The earth is constantly bombarded by solar radiation; some of which is absorbed and some of which are reflected back into space. When more solar radiation is trapped in the earth's atmosphere and less is reflected, the earth begins to warm. Gases like carbon dioxide, Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), methane, tropospheric ozone, and nitrogen oxides trap solar radiation and cause the atmosphere to warm(13). The twentieth century is already 0.6 degrees Celsius (1.08 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the nineteenth century, and according to "global climate records... the 10 warmest years in the past century have all occurred since 1980” Bates and
Flavin comment that the accelerated rate of warming has been attributed mostly to the activities of human beings. Statistics shows that since the Industrial Revolution, human activity has added 170 billion tons of carbon to the atmosphere. According to Flavin, annual growth of global carbon emissions has been steady at about 2 percent per year (17). Statistics of The Little Green Data Book, 2004 shows that CO2 emissions per unit of GDP (kg/PPP$ GDP) is 0.6 and Consumption of CFCs is 42.29 ODP metric tons.

Water

Water is the most common substance on Earth, covering more than 70% of the planet's surface. In the Earth's wheel of life, it provides the balance. It plays a critical role in maintaining life-support systems, in moderating its climate, and in sustaining animals and plans, including minute, oxygen-producing phytoplankton. Through ocean, it provides protein, transportation, energy, employment, recreation, and other economic, social, and cultural activities (4). Al-Quran vividly says in this respect:

"Your sustainer is He who causes ships to move onward for you through the sea, so that you might go about in quest of some of His bounty: verily, a dispenser of grace is He unto you." (17:66)

All living things consist mostly of water; for example, the human body is about two-thirds water. Islam ascribes the most sacred qualities to water as a life-giving, sustaining, and purifying resource. The holy Quran ascertains this truth in the following verse:

"And He it is who has caused waters to come down from the sky; and by this means have We brought forth all living growth, and out of this do We bring forth close-growing grain..." (6:99)

Water is, in fact, the origin of all life on earth, the substance from which God created man (14). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) urged moderation and thriftiness in the use of water during ablution. He warned that each step of wudu (ablution) should not be performed more than three times before each Prayer; the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) himself washed each part only two or three times without ever going beyond three, even if water supplies were abundant. He (peace be on him) warned: "Whoever increases [more than three] lie does injustice and wrong (12) Commentators add, "The men of science disapprove of exaggeration and also of exceeding the number of blutions of the Prophet (7)."

Land

Land is usually referred to the solid part of the surface of the earth. It is often synonymous with the term like dirt, ground, soil, and terra firma etc. (6). The land that covers about 29% of the earth's surface is used for several major purposes. About 39% of the world's land is used by humans for livestock, crops and urban areas. The remaining 61% of the world's land consists of (1) forests and wetlands that are used to varying degrees by humans and (2) desert, tundra, rock, ice-covered land, and steep mountain terrain that is not widely used because it is unsuitable for development. However, the total land area (in 1,000 sq. km) of the world is estimated as 130,145 of which 38% is agricultural land. The detailed types of land available in earth can be seen in the following figure:

However, these divergent types of land as shown in the figure above have been pointed out in the Quran:

"And there are on earth [many] tracts of land close by one another [and yet widely differing from one another]; and [there are on it] uinyards, end fields of grain, and date-palms growing in clusters from
one root or standing alone, - (all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favo4red above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast]. Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason!" (13:4)

Land has attained an esteemed status in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) says: "The earth has been made for me (and for my followers) a place for praying and a thing to perform Tayammum, therefore anyone of my followers can pray wherever the time of a prayer is due"(16) With these words the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) emphasizes the sacred nature of earth or soil, not only as a pure entity but also as a purifying agent. Like air and water, the land and soil are essential for the perpetuation of all kinds. God has made the land a source of sustenance and livelihood for us and other living creatures. He has made the soil fertile to grow the vegetation upon which we and all animal life depend. The holy Quran unequivocally declares in this respect:

Plants and Forests:

Plants are, biologically speaking, eukaryotic, mostly multicelled organisms such as algae (red, blue and green), mosses, ferns, flowers, cacti, grasses, beans, wheat, rice, and trees. These organisms use photosynthesis to produce organic nutrients for themselves and for other organisms feeding on them." This definition of plants is mentioned in the Quran almost in the same manner. Quran penpictures the aesthetic and decorative functions of vegetation, in addition to their use in sustaining and embellishing human life. In Sura Qaf, Quran says:

"And the earth - We have spread it wide, and set upon it mountains firm, and caused it to bring forth plants of all beauteous kinds" (50:7)

In Sura Ar-Rahman, it is mentioned that:

"And the earth has He spread out for all living beings, with fruit thereon, and palm trees with sheathed clusters [of dates], and grain growing tall on its stalks, and sweet-smelling plants." (55:10-13)

The earth has perhaps 30,000 plant species. The existence of these numerous and divergent plant species has been very beautifully mentioned in the Quran:

"For it is He who has brought into being gardens - [both] the cultivated ones and those growing wild - and the date-palm, and fields bearing multiform produce, and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: [all] resembling one another and yet so different!" (6:141)

Among this divergent plant species with parts that people can eat, only 15 plant and 8 terrestrial animal species supply 90% of our food. Just three grain crops - wheat, rice, and corn - provide more than half the calories people consume." The food value of plants is indicated in the Quran:

"Let man, then, consider [the sources of] his food: [how it is] that We pour downwater, pouring it down abundantly; and then We cleave the earth (with new growth), cleaving it asunder, and

thereupon We cause gram to grow out of it, and vines and edible plants, and olive trees and date-palms, and gardens dense with foliage, and fruits and herbage, for you and for your animals to enjoy. (80:24-32)

"And We send down from the skies water rich in blessings, and cause thereby gardens to grow, and fields of grain, and tall palm-trees, toff their thickly-clustered dates, as sustenance apportioned to men; and by fall] this We bring dead land to life: [and] even so will be [man's] coming-forth from death." (50:9-11)

Islam's stand in this respect is very clear. It encouraged people to take care of plants from any damage or death and prohibited cutting or destruction of trees or plants without any meaningful reason. However, Ash-Shawkani and Qurtubi are in agreement that: Jurists hold the view that the trees forbidden to be cut are the wild trees or plants that are not planted or grown by people. As to the trees grown by men there is disagreement among scholars. Islam encouraged people to protect and increase plants for the great reward associated with that. Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, in his address to Yazid Ibn Abu Sufian, the commander of the army that went north to Sham [i.e. Greater Syria]: "...And I instruct you [to fulfill the following] ten [orders]: Do not kill a woman, nor a child, nor an old man; do not cut down fruitful trees; do not destroy [land or housing] in use; do not kill a goat or a camel unless for food; do not flood palm trees [with water] nor burn them down..." This instruction of Abu Bakr, included the prohibition to destroy trees as an act of vengeance or collective punishment. If this is the status of plants in the Islamic world-view during war, it must be that they "enjoy" a better position during the peaceful times.

Species and Biodiversity:

The living creatures of all kind are usually called as species. In Islam, species are regarded as the signs of God. In Quran, the term `claabbah' is used to refer all living creatures, including beasts and crawling & eatures of all kinds. It is mentioned in the Quran:

"And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the living creatures that He has scattered through them" (42:29)

It cannot be said for sure how many species exist on the earth. Estimates range from 5 million to 100 million. So far biologists have identified and named about 1.8 million species, not including bacteria. About 42% (751,000) of these known species are insects, 15% (270,000) are plants, 0.5% (9,000) are birds, and only 0.25% (4,500) are mammals.

On looking at the Quran, the prominent place given to animals, the key members of the ecosystem, is immediately apparent. A number of its Suras bear animals' names: al-Baqara (The Cow); al-Nahl (The Bee), al-Anqabut (The Spider), al-Naml (The Ant). One of the striking expressions the Quran uses about animals is that they are a "community" (ummah). It is especially noteworthy that this concept, which is a significant concept in Islamic tradition and literature, should also be used for animals:

"If you really want to see the signs of Allah, just look at any animal that walks upon the earth and any bird that flies in the air; they too are the communities like you. We have not left out anything from the Book in determining the courses of their lives." (6:38)

He one day related the following story to those sitting by him:

"A traveller felt a great thirst as he went on his way, so stopped at well and drank of its water. As he came up from the well he saw a dog licking the damp soil with its thirsty, lolling tongue. Saying to himself: 'This animal is thirsty like I was,' he went back down to the well and filled his shoe with water. Then holding it firm returned and held it for the dog to drink. God praised that servant of His for his act and forgave all his sinsk" His Companions
then asked him: "So are we rewarded for watering animals?" God's Messenger replied: "There is a reward for giving any living creature to drink"(10).

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) prohibited the ill-treatment of animals, and warned us concerning this question when he said: "A woman was sent to Hell because she tied up her cat and neither gave it food nor allowed it free to hunt the cockroach" (4).

Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) stated that like men, animals employed in various tasks had the right to rest, and when stopping to rest on journeys, in particular insisted that the animals' needs should be met and that they should be rested. Anas ibn Malik, one of the Companions, related: "Whenever we arrived at a stopping-place, we would never start the prayers until we had removed the loads from the pack-animals [and left them free to rest]" (5)

**Conclusion:**

The environment we live in today takes a heinous face by the human activity. Amidst natural change over the last millennium, the effects of human activity have become increasingly felt, and now reach to the outermost atmosphere of planet earth - far more remote to that which we classify as wilderness. The earth's resources are diminishing and nature is in retreat. In less than a century, human population and its requirements for space, materials, goods, and amenities have increased by more than five-fold. 18 Over the past sixty years alone, the explosive growth rates of the global human population and our insatiable consumption of resources have been the cause of widespread collapse of the natural ecosystem. The litany of examples are well-known: the over-harvest of forests, draining of wetlands, spread of agricultural development and high rates of pesticide and fertilizer use, the spread of feral pests, excessive clearing of woodland for domestic stock, urbanization of foreshores, and the pollution of rivers and estuaries. Regrettably many species have been lost. Arguably far more serious are the growing signs of functional problems in the operation of many ecological systems (10). All these environmental damages are caused due to careless human works. Allah has created everything with His omniscient wisdom. It is mentioned in the Quran:

"Behold, everything have We created in due measure and proportion." (54:49)

Allah also cautions humans not to bring any change or corruption in his creation: "hence, do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered." (7:56) But, reckless human interventions have caused all the damages mentioned above. This environmental catastrophe and ecological disasters and the perpetration of human hands in this regard have been narrated very vividly in the glorious Quran:

"Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (thee deed) that the hands of men have earned that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from Evil)." (30:41)

**Reference**


7. In 1967, the historian Lynn White Jr. presented a controversial thesis addressing the roots of the ecological crisis: these roots, according to him, were simply to be found in the beliefs of Juda-Christian religions. Man, in the Biblical tradition, White argues, is above nature. He is a special creation of God and has been commanded to have dominion over nature: (to replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the seas and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.) For details see, White, Lynn Jr. 1967. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis". Science 10 March, 1967. Vol. 155. No. 3767.


