

# Islam and Environmental Conservation

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## ABSTRACT

Environment is an important element for humans because it is a pillar for human survival. Therefore, humans should be wise in terms of interacting with the environment. Unfortunately, many people still do not care about environmental sustainability, such as industrial waste processing which is not environmentally friendly, deforestation, and conversion of land functions. Several solutions have been carried out using scientific method, technology and also government policy, but they still do not produce satisfactory results yet. In fact, destruction of the environment and natural disasters continues to occur. Therefore, this paper offers some solutions from the doctrinal side to preserve the environment. It will discuss about Islamic principles of environment. This study uses a semantic approach and abstraction. Islamic principles of the environment consist of two folds: the principle of monotheism and the principle of the caliph. Using these two basic principles, we hopefully will arrive at a complete understanding about environment. That is, environment is not only seen as a mere satisfying tool for humans and is free from divine values, because both the environment and humans are a unity of God's creation. This means they are similarly God's creation that is bound in one ecosystem, and humans as the representative on earth should represent God's attributes towards the earth, such as being merciful, caring for and protecting the earth, including protecting the earth's functions for the sake of the sustainability of all living beings on earth.

**Keywords:** *Islamic principles, Islamic theology, environmental conservation*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues currently become the center of attention among governmental figures, academicians, and educational institutions such as university. As such is motivated by at least two reasons. Firstly, all human beings want to live in healthy, safe, and prosperous environment. Secondly, the current environmental conditions are indeed at an alarming level. Different forms of environmental damage such as air pollution caused by forest fires and industrial factory chimneys, the extinction of numerous types of river and sea-biota, caused by pollution of rivers and seawater, the lack of water both in quantity and quality, and the spread of rare diseases that attack humans due to dangerous chemicals food component.

Based on such environmental conditions, it raises several assumptions ranging from questioning the role of government in environmental preservation, to the progress of science and technology. According to scientists, environmental damage has many to do with the progress of science and technology. It is undeniable that the discovery and advancement of science and technology have made humans' lives easier, shortening the time and shrinking the distance. Yet science and technology also have a negative impact on environment: deforestation on a large scale, the establishment of industries which are not environmentally friendly, and the disposal of waste or residual production

that pollutes the environment. According to Seyyed Hussen Nasr, the origin of any environmental crisis caused by science and technology is a fault in conceiving humans.[1] Moreover, stated by Indriyani Ma'rifah, the origin of this problem lies in the equitable secular interpretation of human status on earth.[2] According to Sonny Keraf, science which affects negative implications for the environment is the science with an anthropocentrism paradigm.

Anthropocentrism is a theory of environmental ethics which views humans as the center of the universal system.[3] Only humans have the value and may get any attention, while nature will only get value and attention as far as supporting human interests. Consequently, nature is only seen as an object for the fulfillment of human needs, nature has no value in itself. This anthropocentrism paradigm encompasses instrumentalistic view, a paradigm which explains the pattern of human relations with nature as an instrumental relation. Thus, nature is only seen as a tool to fulfill human interests. Another trait that is also inherent in the anthropocentrism paradigm is selfishness, that is, the paradigm that views human interests as the most important, while the interests of other living creatures are secondary and need to adapt to human needs. Finally, this anthropocentrism paradigm encourages humans to exploit, destroy, be selfish, and greedy to nature.

The decline of carrying capacity of nature to living creatures on the earth, makes academician feel called to offer diverse solutions. For example, as stated by Erwati Aziz who argues that there are at least three methods

which can be pursued in preserving the environment, through monotheism education, moral education, and resourceful education. Furthermore, there are several journal articles which examine the efforts to protect the environment to prevent severe crises occur, including: Zainuddin Maliki, Muhammad Wahid Nur Tuaeka, Rabiah Z. Harahap, M. Muhtarom Ilyas,[4] H. Asep Muhyiddin,[5] Junaidi Abdillah,[6] and Dede Rodin[7]. According to experts, there is a fundamental problem that has been neglected in understanding any environmental issues, it is aspects of spirituality (religion). Previously in environmental discourse as a scientific discipline, spirituality did not really capture any place, at least as a reference approach in studying the environmental issues. In fact, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, religion has an important role in supporting to overcome environmental problems. For Nasr, nature is a symbol of God. Understanding this symbol will lead to the existence and friendliness of God and to destroy nature is equivalent with "destroying" God. Thus, understanding environmental issues with the religious approach becomes important because human behavior and thought patterns are in line, while the mindset is influenced by interpretations of religious texts which become the basic principles of understanding the environment. This paper will discuss how is Islamic principles of the environment? This study uses a semantic approach and abstraction.

## 2. DISCUSSION

### 2.1. Environment in Islam

The Qur'an as the holy book of Islam contains living guidelines for humans, without exception Islam also caress about the environment. The word "environment" in Qur'an is expressed in 4 phrase: al-'ālamīn (all creatures), al-samā'(time space), al-arḍ (earth), and al-bī'ah (environment).[8]

First, *al-'ālamīn*. The word al-'ālamīn is mentioned 71 times, which is 44 times being *muḍāf* to the word Rabb, which has two meanings: (1) all creatures (referred 46 times); both biotic and abiotic creatures. The word rabb al-'ālamīn is used for the connotation of God as an Owner, Preserver, and Educator of the whole universe or all creatures (QS. Al-Fātiha: 2). The word al-'ālamīn combined with the preposition: li, 'an, 'alā is mentioned 5 times in the QS. al-Baqarah: 251; Ali 'Imran: 97, 108; al-'Ankabūt: 6, and al-Šaffāt: 79). (2) human species, mentioned in the Qur'an 25 times (Surah al-Baqarah: 37, 122; Ali 'Imran: 33, 42, 97; al-Mā'idah: 20, 115; al-An'ām : 66, 90; al-A'rāf: 140, Yūsuf: 104; al-Hijr: 70; al-Anbiyā': 71, 91, 107; al-Furqān: 1; al-Shu'arā': 165; al-'Ankabūt: 15, 28; al-Šaffāt: 79; Šād: 87; al-Dukhan: 32; al-Jāthiyah: 16; and al-Qalam: 52). The word al-samā' (pl. Al-samāwāt) and its derivation in the Qur'an are mentioned 387 times, in total of 210 times in the singular forms and 117 times in the plural forms.

Secondly, *al-samā'*, etymologically derived from the words samā, yasmū, sumuwu, samā'an, meaning "rising up". Whereas terminologically, this word means the universe (Surah al-Baqarah: 22), air space (Surah al-Naḥl: 79), and space (Surah al-Furqan: 61). Thus, the universe which includes atmospheric space and the biosphere is one of the terms the Qur'an uses to refer to the environment.[9] Third, al-ard, which is mentioned in the Qur'an 463 times, both alone and combined with the word "duty". The word al-arḍ has two meanings. (1) the Earth has already been made with the connotation of land as a space for organisms or microorganisms, an area of human life and geological phenomena. (2) the planet's environment are in the process of becoming, that is, the process of creation and the occurrence of the earth. The distribution of ecological verses which use the word al-ard has various connotations, such as the ecology of the earth (Surah al-Baqarah: 164), the living environment (Surah al-Baqarah: 22, al-A'rāf: 24), the ecosystem of earth ( Surah al-Naḥl: 15), and reprocess in the earth's ecosystem (Surah al-Hajj: 5).

Based on the data of the semantic meaning of the word *al-ard* revealed in the Qur'an, a strong indication has revealed that the word *al-ard* in the Qur'an is used as a term to introduce the term environment in the discipline of environmental science. Thus, it is firm enough to state that one of the environmental concepts in the Qur'an is expressed using the term *al-arḍ*. This correlated with the ecological traditions of the society which regularly use the term environment for the meaning of planet earth. Specifically, the ecological society generally understands the term environment as another expression of the earth.[10]

Fourth, *al-bī'ah* which is a derivation of the word *bā'a*, *yabī'u*, *bī'ah* means returning, occupying territory, space of life, and environment. Quantitatively, this term is mentioned in the Qur'an 18 times, but only 6 verses which directly has meaning of environment as living space (Surah Ali 'Imran: 21; al-A'raf: 74; Yusr: 93; Yufuf: 56; al-Naḥl: 41, and al-'Ankabūt: 58). Terminologically, according to Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-bī'ah* is an environment in which humans live in it, both during traveling or secluded. This environment consists of statics (dead), such as light, atmosphere, buildings, and dynamic (living) environments, such as humans, animals, and plants.

### 2.2. Islamic Principles of the Environment

The human's point of view about the environment will greatly affect the original face of the environment since the perspective will produce the meaning of the environment in accordance with the paradigm believed. Based on the research results from the collaboration of the Deputy for Environmental Communication and Community Empowerment of the Ministry of the Environment and the Environmental Council of the Central Muhammadiyah, the Islamic concept of the environment is basically built on five principles: *Monotheism*, *Khilafah*, *Amanah*, *Adil* and

*Istishlah*. These principles are complemented by two called halal and haram.[11] However, according to the researchers, basically the five pillars possibly extracted into only two principles: the principle of monotheism (Tauhid) and the principle of the caliph (Khalifah). Since several principles become obligations which must be fulfilled by other principles, automatically although these principles are not mentioned separately, the value is already enclosed in other principles. As an example, the principle of trustworthiness, justice, and also *istishlah*, should already exist in the principle of the caliph, because the position of humans as servants of God as well as representatives of God on earth is impossible to negate these characteristics. The following are the principles of Islam as an environmental-friendly religion or green deen. [12]

### 2.2.1. Principle of Monotheism (Tauhid)

To initiate the discussion of monotheism principle in the context of the environment (the universe), it can begin with a question "where did the universe come from and obtain its existence?". This is a basic question to explain the existence and role of God in the creation and preservation of the environment. Islam as a doctrinal religion, in the belief of Islam, the universe was created by God. God is an "Essence" which is non-empirical and He gives meaning and life to each of his creations. He is all-encompassing (*al Muhith*) and immeasurable. Furthermore, it can be explained that the existing environment is an empirical reality which not stand-alone, but is associated with a non-empirical and transcendent reality. Therefore, monotheism is the basis and reference in humans thinking and behavior in terms of interaction with the environment. Every human behavior correlated with the environment must be based on a belief about the oneness and absolute power of God. Therefore, one's faith is imperfect if he/she does not consider the environmental sustainability. Believers are required to functions their faith by believing that environmental conservation is part of faith.[13] Conversely, people who damage the environment can be categorized as an environmental disbeliever (*kufr al-bī'ah*). Extensively, monotheism enclosed the meaning of unity (unity) between God, humans, and the environment. So, the relationship between those three should be occurs in a balanced and harmonious way. The removal of one of the God poles will caused disharmony. The removal of the poles of God will cause secularism which exploits nature and results in an environmental crisis. While the removal of the natural pole, will make people become impoverished in knowledge and civilization. This monotheistic doctrine which stated by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, becoming a worldview which provides a holistic explanation of reality.[14] Furthermore, the implications of understanding monotheism related to the environment may lead humans to the understanding of environment as a part of the signs (verses) of Allah in the universe. Therefore, the Qur'an presents the term which means "sign" to describe the

nature phenomena, which is a sign of Allah, a sign of His greatness or a sign of a journey to the world happiness (zahir) and the hereafter (batin). According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the significance of nature is in harmony with the significance of the Qur'an, where the Qur'an is a representation of revelation which is collected in the symbol of written language and words, while the universe is a representation of revelation which is outspread. Therefore, both are referred to as God's verses. The first verse that refers to part of the surahs of the Qur'an, and the second verse refers to the greatness of God that lies in human and the universe.

### 2.2.2. The Principle of the Caliphate (Khalifah)

The position of the Caliph is built on the basis of God's preference and human readiness for the mandate from God. As caliphs on earth, humans executed two roles at once: as the representatives of Allah and as servants of Allah. As a representative of Allah (Surah al-Baqarah: 30), humans are mandatory actively to be able to represent themselves in accordance with the attributes of God. One of the attributes of God associated with nature is to be a guardian or guardian of nature (*al-rab al'alamīn*) (QS. Hūd: 61).[15] So as God's representative on earth, humans should be functions and responsible for protecting the earth. Safeguarding this earth means maintaining the continuity of the earth's function as a place of life for God's creatures, including humans. Throughout the time, the position of humans as servants of God describing humans which obliged to serve Him (Surah al-Dhāriyāt: 56), and environmental conservation is part of a servant's devotion (worship) to the Creator. The principle of human inauguration as a representative of God on earth requested human awareness that he is the actor in charge of the environment. Although he is allowed to take advantage of the environment, he still have an obligation to preserve it (QS. Al-Qaṣaṣ: 77). For this reason, humans are not permitted to exploit the nature with no responsibility. Because in the view of the Qur'an, the ultimate owner of the environment is Allah (Surah al-Baqarah: 284, Ali 'Imran: 109, 129, 180, 189; al-Nisā': 126, 131, 132, 170, 171; al-Mā'idah: 17-18, 40, 120; al-A'rāf: 157; al-Taubah: 116; Yunus: 55, 66). Whereas human ownership is only entrusted which in turn shall be returned to the owner responsibly.[16]

According to MS Ka'ban, in terms of interacting with the environment, humans have three mandates from God. First, *al-intifā'*, God invites humans to take advantage and utilize natural products as well as possible for their prosperity and benefit. Second, *al-i'tibār*, humans are required to always realize and explore the key behind God's creation and take lessons from different natural events. Third, *al-iṣlāh*, humans are required to maintain and preserve the environment.[17] Sustainability of the human's function and role on the environment in Islam is guided by two instruments which perform as guidelines for humans called halal and haram. Halal means everything that is good, produces good results, is beneficial, and is

reassuring. Therefore, everything which has benefit on society and its natural-social environment is considered as halal. While haram is everything that is bad, dangerous or damaging to a person, society, the natural and social environment. Moreover, everything which harms and damages the physical (body) and soul (spiritual) of humans, and the natural environment is considered as haram. The concept of halal and haram is not only applied to humans, but also applies to the environment. Violation of the signs will result in an imbalance in human life and the environment. The highest goal of this value center system is universal welfare (*istishlah*) (all beings) now (the world) and in the future (hereafter).[18] If the principle of monotheism and khalifah is then framed with halal and haram signs as human guidelines in interacting with the environment, the human relations with the environment will be harmoniously established for all ecosystems. The Islamic principle of the environment implies a great respect for the environment, respect for the interrelations of each component and aspect of life, recognition of the unity of creation.[19] Islam views the nature and its contents as a gift of God which need to be thankful for. Humans as recipients of favors that were entrusted by God is impossible to escape from his human values (humanity) which are accompanied by Divine values (deity). Thus, humans will become a person who is united with their humanity, not neutral, but in favor of values that are based on the God's religion as its creator.[20]

### 3. CONCLUSION

The Qur'an as the holy book of guidance in Islam explains the environment with several terms such as: *al-'alamīn* (all species), *al-samā'* (space time), *al-ard* (earth), and *al-bī'ah* (environment). The Islamic principle of the environment rests on two basic principles called the principle of monotheism and the principle of the caliph which is then guided by halal and haram signs. Understanding of the principle of monotheism will deliver humans to the understanding that humans and the environment are a unity of creation and humans as God's representatives on earth are required to perform God's role on the earth with certain boundaries called *halal* and *haram*.

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