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Islamic Responses to Environmental Protection and Sustainability: Principles and Contemporary Applications

ABSTRACT

The study explores the need of environmental sustainability in Islam through investigating basic sources of Islam and their applicability in contemporary era. The research highlights basic principles like mizan, khilafah and amana which make part of the Islamic concept of the environment. The Quran and Hadith guide that it is ma's responsibility to protect the environment and keep it in balance. The article also focuses the applicability of these issues in the modern age where the world is facing the range of environmental concerns like climate change, water crisis, deforestation and pollution. The practical application of Islamic ethics and law, the study explores the human responsibility to protect the environment. The study also involves the understanding of the Islamic finance and investments for green projects like green sukuk, eco-mosques and charities for improving environment. It is a qualitative approach and data is collected through secondary sources; books, articles and online sources. The study explores the possibility for all Muslims to make advanced strategies and techniques to include the understanding of environmental protection and its importance in line with Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Islamic environmental ethics; Khilafah (stewardship); Sustainable development in Islam; Eco-mosques; Green sukuk; Climate change and Islam; Environmental fiqh.

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Introduction

The environmental protection and sustainability has become an international concern in cotemporary era. The issues of deforestation, climate change, and limiting natural resources are major challenges. When we explore these issues in depth, the Islamic concepts as balance (*mizan*), stewardship (*khilafah*), and trust (*amana*) are used to develop proper understanding of issue. The Islamic principles provide the motivation to protect the environment and effective ways to tackle climate change and solutions that are more effective.¹

Islamic environmental principles have been mentioned in the Qur'an and the Hadith that directs the humanity's role as caretaker and vicegerent on the Earth. The study analyzes these basic Islamic sources and relates them with present Muslim scholarship,² by highlighting how these principles can be applied in modern era, including the modern concepts of green finance, mosque designs that are eco-friendly, and collective sustainability measures and initiatives by the Muslim world.³ The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him."⁴

In another Hadith the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advised:

"Do not waste water, even if performing ablution on the banks of a fast-flowing river."⁵

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"While a man was walking on a road, he saw a branch of a tree lying on the road and removed it. Allah appreciated his action and forgave him."⁶

Islamic Environmental Ethics: Foundational Principles

***Khilafah* (Stewardship)**

The Islamic concept of *khilafah* (stewardship) is central to Islamic environmental ethics. It makes human's responsibility to work as guardian on Earth, entrusted with its protection and care. This responsibility is mentioned in Qur'anic verses, such as:

"It is He who has made you successors upon the earth"⁷

Muslim scholars explain this verse as human is responsible for protecting ecological balance and harm to environment.⁸ The concept of *khilafah* goes beyond individual duty and encourages communities and societies to develop policies and practices that secure natural resources for our generations.⁹ It is in line with modern environmental movements that speak for sustaining ecosystems and protecting biodiversity.¹⁰

***Mizan* (Balance)**

The Islamic principle of *Mizan* explains the balance that Allah has made in world, as mention in the Qur'an:

¹ Abdullah, Yusuf. *Islam and the Environment: A New Perspective*. Cambridge: Islamic Publications, 2020.

² Foltz, Richard. *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. New York: SUNY Press, 2005.

³ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1968.

⁴ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, hadith no. 1552.

⁵ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, vol. 2, book 1, hadith no. 425.

⁶ Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, book 43, hadith no. 652.

⁷ Qur'an 6:165.

⁸ Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. "Environmental Care in Islam: A Qur'anic Perspective." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 21, no. 3 (2010): 321-340.

⁹ Khalid, Fazlun M. *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity, and the Climate Crisis*. London: Kube Publishing Ltd., 2019.

¹⁰ Foltz, *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*, 67.

“And the heaven He has raised and imposed the balance”¹¹

Mizan is the divine balance in natural world, which should not be corrupted by human activities. This Islamic concept is important to understand the Islamic perspective about sustainability that directs to adopt moderation and the motivates to avoid the excessiveness in production and consumption.¹² Violating *Mizan*, through environmental degradation or overconsumption, is considered as a moral failure in Islam.¹³ So, adopting *Mizan* encourages Muslim societies to live in harmony with their environment, making it sure that natural resources are being used equitably and responsibly.¹⁴

Amana (Trust)

The Islamic concept of *Amana* (trust) represents that Allah has made human responsibility to preserve and protect the Earth. Islamic sources frequently mention it:

“Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it”¹⁵

The Qur’anic verse narrates the big responsibility that human carries in safeguarding and protecting the environment.¹⁶ Failure to fulfill the responsibility leads to negative consequences not only her but also hereafter.¹⁷ Thus, environmental protection is not only a concern for Muslims but also a religious obligation present in the divine trust between humanity and Allah.¹⁸

Applications of Islamic Environmental Principles in the Modern World

Islamic Environmental Movements and Activism

Muslim countries and societies globally are increasingly developing the role of Islamic teachings in order to address the environmental issues and challenges. Different Muslim scholars and organizations have started the efforts to revive Islamic environmental ethics and their application to deal contemporary issues like climate change, water scarcity and deforestation.¹⁹

One of such initiative is in shape of the Green Mosque Project, which works on building mosques more environment and eco-friendly by using renewable energy sources, adopting water conservation methods, and developing awareness about the environment in the communities.²⁰ These mosques serve as noble places of worship and as educational hubs that promote environmental stewardship in Muslim communities.²¹

Another excellent example is the development of *green sukuk* (Islamic bonds), that fund on environmentally sustainable developments and projects. These financial resources align with Islamic teachings of ethical investment and develop a way for Muslims to participate in global environmental sustainability efforts.²² Green *sukuk* are used to generate funds for

¹¹ Qur'an 55:7.

¹² Khalid, *Signs on the Earth*, 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 50.

¹⁵ Qur'an 33:72.

¹⁶ Khalid, *Signs on the Earth*, 45.

¹⁷ Kamali, "Environmental Care in Islam," 328.

¹⁸ Khalid, *Signs on the Earth*, 47.

¹⁹ Mustafa, Abubakr. "Islamic Environmental Activism: A Global Overview." *Islamic Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (2019): 87-102.

²⁰ Mustafa, "Islamic Environmental Activism," 90.

²¹ Khalid, *Signs on the Earth*, 55.

²² Abdullah, *Islam and the Environment*, 145.

renewable energy projects, reforestation efforts, and different environmentally friendly activities in Muslim countries.²³

The people in Muslim-majority countries are realising that how important Islamic knowledge is for motivating to compete with environmental challenges. There is a significant realization of the importance for incorporating environmental ethics and spiritual values from religious point of view in the modern efforts toward environmental sustainability. This reassessment of the Islamic tradition has also caused of a variety of movements, scholars and environmentalists to use these principles to address contemporary ecological and environmental challenges.

One important effort in is the Green Mosque Project that has developed as a pioneering initiative to make mosque more environmental and eco-friendly. Traditionally the mosques have served Muslims as worship places and for community gathering, but with initiative of Green Mosque Project, they are now developing into centers of environmental education and sustainability. These mosques are being designed to incorporate renewable energy sources like solar panels, and the use of water conservation technologies for reducing waste. By implementation of these sustainable practices, the mosques are minimizing their carbon footprint and serving as models of ecological responsibility for the Muslim community.

The Green Mosque Project is reducing environmental impact of mosque buildings; it also focusing to foster a culture of environmental stewardship in worshippers. Environmental awareness programs are integrated in mosque activities, motivating individuals to develop greener habits in their lives. Educational workshops, religious sermons, and community initiatives highlight the importance of conserving water, reducing wastes, and supporting sustainable environmental development. These mosques serve as educational places, where people learn about Islamic environmental ethics and methods to implement them practically.

A motivating part of the Green Mosque Project is its relation to the broader Islamic tradition of *waqf* that is called charitable endowment. In the Islamic history, *waqf* institutions used to fund public works that are beneficial for collective community, such as hospitals, schools, and water fountains. The concept of *waqf* is being used to support environmental protection activities, including the building of eco-friendly mosques. These initiatives are in line with the Muslim focus on charity and community development which make it important in order to use Islamic teaching to resolve contemporary environmental issues.

Other than Mosques projects, Islamic finance is also being used to develop sustainability with the increase of green *sukuk*. *Sukuk* are Islamic bonds that comply with Muslim Shariah law teachings that prohibit interest (*riba*) and develop ethical investment. Green *sukuk* especially fund for environmentally sustainable projects is enabling a way for Muslims to participate in world sustainability efforts while complying with Islamic financial teachings. These financial tools are used to fund for a broader set of activities that include renewable energy projects, water conservation and reforestation programs in Islamic countries.

In Muslim world green *sukuk* are being used for the purpose to protect the environment. The Greek *Sukuk* reflects the principle of *Amana* and *Khilafa*. The funds which are received from them are being used for reducing environmental damage within Muslim lands. Renewable

²³ Mustafa, "Islamic Environmental Activism," 95.

energy projects are being installed with this funding, that are helpful in order to reduce green house gas emissions and deforestation.

If we see towards issuing green sukuk, Muslim countries like Indonesia and Malaysia are doing more than the rest of Muslim world. In this regard, Malaysia is leading country, which issued first sovereign green sukuk in 2017 for supporting renewable energy projects. This achievement represents that Islamic financial instruments are working to achieve the goal of Paris agreement on climate change. Other Muslim countries are also following the model and achieving both economic growth and environmental betterment.

Through green sukuk, Muslim countries are achieving United Nations and World Bank sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are playing their active role for producing clean energy and responsible production without gas emissions. So through them, religious ethical duties are being fulfilled.

Different Islamic organizations are also working for the environmental protection. Islamic foundation of Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) is a UK based, which is working since 1980 for reforestation and reducing waste water conservation programs. The focus of this organization is on Islamic principles of *Mizan* and *Khilafa*. The organization engages community leaders, scholars and activists for making educational programs to promote the sense and awareness about environment betterment within Muslim countries and communities in the world.

The other popular organization is global Muslim Network (GMCN). Its establishment is based in response to increasing climate change threats. It educates Muslim countries to take preventive measures against the global warming. It organizes climate marches and encourages Muslim leaders to work for environment betterment. Its most important achievement is the Declaration on Global Climate Change in 2015. This declaration was signed by renowned Muslim leaders and scholars to protect the environment of their territories. This declaration is based upon religious guidelines that are found in Qur'an and Hadith about environmental protection. The declaration is beneficial in order to limiting greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning renewable energy sources.

The works of IFEES and GMCN are considered very important to create awareness about environmental protection and ethics in Muslim lands. These are based on Islamic principles *Amana* and *Khilafa*.

Moreover, Islamic environmental consideration and activities are not limited to Muslim countries but in United States and other Muslim communities are also working to create awareness among people. The US based organization Green Muslims is actively working for promoting environmental education which include the activities like tree planting and eco-iftars.

The productive activities and wasreness by the Muslim organizations in majority and minority muslim countries are promoting Islamic environmental ethics. They are fulfilling the religious environmental ethical duties such as *Amana*, *Khilafa* and *Mizan*.

Islamic Finance and Sustainability

Islamic finance is developed as a key player in promoting sustainable development.²⁴ The principles of Islamic finance that prohibit usury (*riba*) and speculative transactions (*gharar*), are inherently comply with the objectives of sustainability.²⁵ Investments should be made in ethical and socially responsible ventures that have led to the promotion of *green sukuk* as a financial tool to fund eco-friendly projects.²⁶

Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia are at the forefront of issuing green *sukuk* and the funds are being used to develop renewable energy sources as well as promoting environmental conservation.²⁷ These initiatives show how Islamic finance can be used for addressing environmental issues, while remaining consistent with Islamic moral and ethical teachings.²⁸

Case Studies of Islamic Environmental Initiatives

Eco-Mosques:

Several mosques around the Muslim world have implemented eco-friendly designs and practices, including solar energy, rainwater harvesting systems, and sustainable building materials.²⁹ One renowned instance is the Eco-Mosque in Cambridge, UK, which is designed to be carbon-neutral.³⁰ It is used as a model for incorporating Islamic values with modern sustainability activities to illustrate how faith-based initiatives can participate in global environmental goals.³¹

Several mosques around the world have adopted the increasing environmental consciousness by incorporating eco-friendly designs and sustainable activities. Environmental principles of Islam are being revived to deal with modern environmental and pollution challenges. Cambridge Central Mosque is considered as the Eco-Mosque which is an excellent representation of Islamic faith based architecture. It is designed to be carbon neutral with green technologies and modern design techniques. So, spiritual places are now forefront in order to fulfill ethical environmental responsibilities. Its design philosophy is based on the Islamic principles of *Khilafah* which says that human are stewards on earth to prevent and maintain its recourses. The religious based engineers and designers have considered a lot of religious ethical guidelines in its construction. The mosques is a combination of Islamic environmental ethics, more ecological innovations, green technologies and energy efficient designed. It has become a model for the future mosques in the Muslim communities.

The designs of Cambridge Central Mosque's are also being used by the non-Muslim places of worship such as synagogues, churches and temples. These religious buildings are being used similar kind of green technologies and techniques for the betterment of environment.

²⁴ Kamali, "Environmental Care in Islam," 332.

²⁵ Ibid., 334.

²⁶ Mustafa, "Islamic Environmental Activism," 99.

²⁷ Abdullah, *Islam and the Environment*, 156.

²⁸ Khalid, *Signs on the Earth*, 60.

²⁹ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 65.

³⁰ Khalid, *Signs on the Earth*, 63.

³¹ Abdullah, *Islam and the Environment*, 163.

Through the places of worship, people are taking a sense of awareness to compete with modern environmental challenges.

The Masjid Agung Darussalam in Indonesia has included in its construction, water saving devices, solar panel, and LED lighting etc. This has become an excellent model for the future mosques in the Muslim world.

Similarly, Malaysia is also playing its key role for building eco-friendly mosques. The government is supporting such religious projects. So, Malaysian government is very active to promote Muslim green identity in the world and to achieve sustainable environmental goals.

In Arab world, The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque has incorporated different green initiatives that include energy efficient lightening, water waste management program and water recycling system. The initiatives reflect the UAE's commitment to work with the rest of Muslim world to compete with environment challenges. The success of these eco friendly mosques reflects the practicability of Islamic teaching about stewardship.

Mosques around the world are going green, proving that Islam's teachings on caring for the Earth can be part of amazing architectural projects. In rural Bangladesh, mosques are using solar panels to provide electricity to communities without power. These mosques serve as community centers, offering prayer spaces and electricity for locals. This solar energy initiative tackles environmental and social challenges, showing how Islamic values like charity and stewardship can address crucial needs.

The global growth of eco-friendly mosques demonstrates how faith-based efforts can combat environmental issues. These mosques reduce their own environmental impact and inspire their communities to live more sustainably. By combining Islamic values with modern sustainability practices, eco-friendly mosques bridge the gap between tradition and environmentalism.

Religious institutions can lead the fight against climate change and environmental degradation. As the world faces environmental crises, eco-friendly mosques offer valuable solutions. They show that faith and environmental responsibility go hand-in-hand. Mosques embracing sustainability prove that Islamic principles like stewardship, conservation, and balance can protect the Earth for future generations.

Green Hajj Initiatives:

The pilgrimage of Hajj show significant environmental challenges, including waste generation and carbon emissions. Recently, efforts have been made to promote a "Green Hajj," motivating pilgrims to reduce their environmental impact by minimizing waste, conserving water, and using environmentally friendly transportation choices.³² These efforts are based on the teachings of *khilafah* and *amana*, reinforcing the idea that environmental responsibility is basic part of Islamic faith.³³

Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Islamic Environmentalism

Islamic teachings offer powerful solutions for environmental protection. However, promoting environmentalism in Muslim countries faces challenges. One major issue is that many Muslims don't know about Islam's strong environmental traditions and how they can help modern sustainability efforts.

Another challenge is that many Muslim countries struggle with poverty, political instability, and economic growth. Environmental issues often take a backseat. But this also presents an opportunity. Islamic environmentalism can be combined with development goals to create sustainable solutions that address both environmental and socio-economic problems.

Conclusion

Islamic teachings promote environmental ethics and it is responsibility of human to protect its surroundings. These teachings are in shape of Islamic principles of Amana, Trust, stewardship and balance which are derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. There are many initiatives such as green finance, eco-friendly mosques and Green Hajj represents the work and awareness by Muslim countries, communities and organization across the world. Climate change and environmental issues are common for the people of all religions and races of the world. So Muslim world is leading for getting environmental sustainability but yet a lot of work has to do to save our future generations and provide them a better place to live.

³² Mustafa, "Islamic Environmental Activism," 105.

³³ Abdullah, *Islam and the Environment*, 170.