

Environmentalism in the Quran

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Abstract

The complex interests of humanity have been increasing both in the quality and quantity. An environment with all its resources becomes the main source for humans to fulfill their needs. The basic need to continue living with nature becomes a global problem that should not have happened. The Quran as guidance in Islam has given a warning for all humanity to maintain the environment properly since it will have a good impact on humans themselves. The Quran with all the concepts and terminology about nature and environment shows that Islam is a friendly religion and even obliges its believers to live side by side and recognize natural behaviors properly because humans themselves will get the benefits. Islam as a religion carrying the message rahmatan lil alamin certainly does not exclude or specialize in spreading mercy to humans. It also includes all things in the universe. This paper tries to explain how the views of the Quran on the environment, which indeed provide space or special discussion about environmental safeguards. Thus humans, generally followers of religions and more specifically Muslim, can make religion not only the foundation of worship in the context of getting closer to God. Moreover, religion, in general, must also be able to provide a basic environmental view for its followers.

Keywords: quran, islam, religion, environment

Introduction

Today's environmental conditions are very alarming, starting from the small scope around us to the environment in a large scope in our world. Everything shows the state of our environment to be critical. Only a small portion of our environment is included in good or proper conditions. The environmental problems we face now are not enough just to be resolved by technology, science, as well as law/legislation from the government. However, we should not forget the aspect of religion in giving an understanding toward the environment. This is because religion will greatly affect the understanding and values of its adherents. If religion plays a role in providing an understanding of the importance of environmental insight, its adherents will have

strong confidence in maintaining the environment around them. Consequently, there will be a synergy between religious beliefs and technology or science in their efforts to preserve the environment.

Religious values, believed by the adherents, are able to provide a very strong foundation in looking at all aspects of life, including the views on the environment and life. It is not surprising that Islam has a fairly comprehensive view of the environment. Islam is known as the religion which is *rahmatan lil alamin*. The concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* makes Islam an inclusive religion. This means that all aspects of life and the universe are under the attention of Islam. Environmental aspects, in this case, are no exception.

Scientists have classified theories in viewing the environment embodied in the Theories of Environmental Ethics. For example, the Anthropocentrism Environmental Theory holds that humans are the center of the universe. Contrary to anthropocentrism, Biocentrism views that nature has its own values. Biocentrism itself is strengthened by Eco-centrism which has the same view, especially its attorney towards Anthropocentrism. Different from the previous three theories, Eco-feminism offers a new way of thinking. Especially in humans who are wrong in viewing and thinking about their relationship with the environment. That is a glimpse of the theories of environmental ethics that exist today. However, this paper will not discuss further explanation about those theories. Instead, the paper is more emphasized in the Islamic view of the environment in the texts of the Quran or Al-Qur'an (Keraf, 2002, p.75).

There are many Islamic religious texts, mainly in the Quran and Hadith, which explain the importance of protecting the environment and the universe. This shows how Islam pays attention to the environment and importantly should be studied, understood, and subsequently applied in real life. This paper will explain how the Islamic approach views the environment. Included in the texts of Islam are the Quran and Hadith that state the importance of the environment. Thus, Islam can truly be

understood as a religion which is *rahmatan lil alamin* for all nature and makes Islam "an environmentally friendly religion".

The Concept of Environment in the Quran

The meaning of the environment itself, in general, can be interpreted as all objects, conditions, and influences contained in the place we occupy and affect living things including human life (Suryani, 2007, pp.28-29). The environment, in this case, is the environment around humans, where organisms and non-organism things develop and create. From this understanding, humans, organisms, and non-organism are an inseparable part of the environment. It cannot be denied that humans are biologically derived from this nature and will return back to nature.

In the meantime, Indonesian Constitution Number 23 of 1997 states the meaning of the environment as a combination of space with all objects, power, circumstances, and needs of life, including human beings and their behavior, which affects the survival of life and the welfare of humans and other living beings. It means that there is a need for unity and harmony between the four environmental components, namely objects, power, conditions, and living things.

The environment in Islamic religious texts (the Quran and Hadith) is often called nature. Yet, there is no fixed or standard definition of the environment. It simply and sometimes implicitly is mentioned as nature in the Quran.

The Quran or Al-Quran in several terms introduces the concept of environment, including all species (*al-alamin*), time space (*as-sama'*), earth (*al-ard*), and environment (*al-bi'ah*). The most frequently mentioned word in the Quran is *al-alamin* referred 71 times in the form of phrases (*idhafah*) or a combination of words (*syibhul jumlah*). Contextually the word *al-alamin* does not only connote all species, but it is also used as a connotation of intelligent beings like humans (Ramlay, 2007, p.24)

Al-Alamin

The word *Al-alam* in the Quran is usually juxtaposed with the word *Rabbun*, so that it becomes *Rabbun al-Alamin*. This phrase (*idhofah*) connotes the Lord of the whole universe or God of all species, both biotic and abiotic species. This is similar to one verse of the letter *Al-Fatihah* which is meaningful. The word *rabbun* itself is a form of *masdar* which means the owner, educator, and preserver. In another side, the word *al-alam* has meaning as the entire contents of the universe, both macro, and micro-nature, both real and magical.

The phrase shows the theological framework of the Lord's declaration, the owner, educator, and preserver, and the entire species. Thus *rabbun al-Alamin*, is the objective and subjective theological approach. The meaning of the objective theological framework is that as a conceptual, recognized or not recognized by species, God is the owner and educator as well as the preserver of all species. The meaning of subjective theology, stating the God as an educator, owner, and preserver, is assumed by species communicants relatively (Mujiono, 2001, p.45). It means not all species recognize the existence of God as *rabbun*. This is due to the fact that it is subjective in nature, although the potential to recognize God as *rabbun* does exist.

Al-Sama'

The next word in the Quran which reveals the environment is *Al-Sama'*. *Al-Sama'* itself means to increase, sublime, and also means something high. However, contextually *Al-Sama'* means space, time space or the cosmos. Quantitatively the word *Al-Sama'* is mentioned in the Quran 387 times (Baiquni, 1994, p.27).

Although the word *Al-Sama'* in the Quran connotes as space and time-space, if we look at the whole, it leads to the whole universe. This is enough to be the basis for stating that the word *al-sama'* also means environment. This is Because *al-sama'* also

includes our airspace which is the atmosphere and all the layers that we must guard as well.

Al-Ardl

In terms of quantity, the word *al-ardl* is mentioned in the Quran as much as 463 times. In term of quality, the word *al-Ardl* has two meanings. First, it means the planet of Earth, which is significant as the land, room and its contents as well as shelter living creatures and the geological phenomenon. The second, the words *al-Ardl* has an *environmental* meaning for the planet in the process of creation and occurrence of the planet Earth. The words *al-ardl* mentioned many times in the Quran gives a strong indication that the word is indeed used as a term to explain environmental terms.

Al-bi'ah

The next term stated in the Quran to introduce the term environment is *al-biah*. The word *al-biah* means occupying territory, space of life and environment. Totally, the word *al-biah* is mentioned in the Quran 18 times. The word *al-biah* itself in the Quran has closed meaning to the environment as a space of life and, in particular, as for mankind. It can be said that the word *al-biah* has a well-established base in the spirit of a vibrant environmental insight being intensified today. In fact, the Quran had been presenting long before awareness of the importance of preserving the environment as it is today.

Islam and the Environmental Approach

For Islam, nature is not only objects that have no meaning other than being utilized or just explored to meet human needs. Nature in the view of Islam is signs (verses) of the "existence" of Allah. Nature provides a way for humans to know His existence through many signs. Allah says in the Quran, "*And on the earth are signs for those of assured Faith*" (Surah Adh-Dhariyat:20).

For experts of *hikmah* (wisdom), nature is a manifestation of all the names and attributes of Allah. For example, plants reflect the divine in the form of knowledge because the plants know how to find food from light; the fruit is a manifestation of the grant and gift of God; and the animal is a reflection of the divine, life, knowledge, desire, and power. According to Yusuf Qordhawi, naming *Surah* in the Quran by utilise the names of animals (such as *Al-baqarah*, *Al-an'am*, *Al-fil*, *An-nahl*, *An-naml*, etc.) and the names of plants (such as *At-tin* and other natural names such as *An-najm*, *Al-fajr*, *Ash-syams*, *Al-lail* etc.) constitutes signs for humans to aware that they are bound by the universe or the environment. Thus, humans, as *khalifah fil ardh*, should not be negligent in maintaining the preservation of the surrounding environment.

Since nature is a manifestation of all names and divine attributes, destroying nature means destroying God's signs on earth. Humans, especially Muslims, must treat them well because it is a medium to contemplate the omnipotence of Allah (*Surah Adh-Dharyat*: 20).

Concluding Remarks

As humans living on the earth who cannot be separated from their relationship with the environment, paying attention to environmental issues (at least the small scope around us) is fundamental. It is because today's environmental problems are increasingly alarming. As the place to live of all kinds of creature, maintenance, management, and utilization of nature is critical. The attempt can be started by providing broad insights from various aspects of our society. In this case, it can be especially the religious insights and views (*dakwah*) considering that our society cannot be separated from religion.

Islam itself has deep attention to the environment and the importance of preserving it. As explained in the previous discussion, many texts in the Quran explain (either explicitly or implicitly) the need to protect the environment. The utilization of

the words *al-Alamin*, *al-Sama'*, *al-Ardl*, and *al-Bi'ah* shows that Islam pays attention indispensably in viewing and how to treat the cosmos and micro nature.

This view is inseparable from the concept of Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin*. The *Rahmat* does not merely mean love textually. Moreover, it also includes maintenance, utilization, and management for the whole universe. We can, thus, conclude that Islamic teachings are so friendly to the environment including the living things, namely animals and plants. The environment and nature that we occupy is not the inheritance of our previous generation. More than that, the environment and nature are for our next generation in the future. From the explanation, it is absolutely necessary to have extensive knowledge and insight for religious communities, especially the Islamic community. It becomes important for the religious leaders and Islamic education institutions to provide education with environmental insight into the community as early as possible.

The leaders and institutions are very influential in society. Religious figures, such as clerics, scholars, teachers, and preachers have considerable influence on Muslim society, especially the middle-aged. In the villages, especially, the role of the clerics or scholars for the Islamic community is paramount importance in providing insight into the environment and its preservation. The other one, educational institutions, especially Islamic education institutions, is also fundamental. Many Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia are spread from cities to the remote areas. Some of them are privately owned and are able to replace the role of public education institutions. The Islamic education institution should be employed as a medium to provide knowledge about the importance of the environment. Environmental insight will be more effective if given as early as young age, especially in school age. Thus it will be a strategic field to shape our young generation to be environmentally friendly. Indeed, it must be implemented comprehensively in all Islamic educational institutions through a sustainable agenda.

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