

Some Islamic Views on Environmental Responsibility

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Abstract. Allah created all things with precise measurements. These divine measures guarantee the survival and sustainability of natural resources. This paper discusses some of the environmental aspects in the view of Islam and makes a comparison between the Islamic thought and some scientific theories. Results show that whereas Western theories emphasise environmental protection as a response to external forces and the achievement of special interests, Islam considers environmental protection as the only way of maintaining the balance of life.

Key words: Islam, environment, scientific theories

1. Introduction

Although the word ‘environment’ has not been mentioned explicitly in the Quran or the Sunnah, if we take the meaning of the environment as the earth and everything surrounding it, then we will find that this concept is mentioned 199 times in the Quran (www.Islamset.com). Islam considers all aspects related to sustainability. The basic tenets of Islam are based on a comprehensive and insightful view that forces people to conserve and respect the environment. In Islam, this is the only way to guarantee sustainability and survival. Islam identifies the Muslim as a person who belongs to a group and who knows that his/her survival depends on the survival of this group (The First Islamic Conference of Sustainability Ministers, 2003). Therefore, this person has to behave with respect to the society and in a way that maintains and develops the social and environmental aspects of his/her group. Allah created all things with precise measurements. These divine measures guarantee the survival and sustainability of natural resources. Therefore, Islam advises people to maintain the balance, as the world was created in balance.

2. The Environmental Concept in Islam

In Islam, the environment is a broad concept. It includes climate and its components, plants, animals, sand, human being, and all things found on the ground or in the atmosphere. The concept of the environment in Islam is ‘a comprehensive concept that includes earth, sky, and mountains with all creatures, in addition to human and their motivations, emotions and instincts’ (Abduslam, 2010). All these creatures were created to service the people. Therefore, the people are responsible for maintaining and conserving the environment. Islam forbids wasting of resources and destroying the environment. The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered the Muslims not to cut trees during the war. He emphasised the conservation of the environment and the prevention of its destruction. Therefore, conserving the environment is a religious duty of every Muslim.

The importance of environment in Islam extends to every environmental aspect. Maintaining the environment has a specific place in the Islamic thought. The next section discusses some of these aspects and explains how Islam treats these aspects.

According to the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), water appears in the Holy Quran in over 50 ‘verses’ and 40 ‘Suras’. In sura Nahl, Verse 65, Allah said, ‘And God sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith to the earth after its death’. Islam considers water as a basic

element of life. Therefore, people and other creatures cannot live without water. According to Allah, 'We made from water every living thing' (Al-Anbiya: 30). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'Don't waste water even you are on a running river', which shows the importance of water in the Islamic thought. Both the Quran and Sunnah emphasise the rationale of using water. If water dries up, life will end; this is true because water is the most important element in the life of an organism. In history, all ancient civilisations were established near water, clearly indicating that people cannot live without water. Therefore, water is important in the Islamic thought. In Islam, water means life. The principles of water in Islamic thought can be summarised in two points. (1) The property of water is not limited to some people; it is common. Ownership of water is not allowed in Islam, especially the ground water. (2) The drinking of water by people or animals takes priority over other uses (ISESCO). The limitation of water resources and non-renewable resources of water increases the demand for water. This situation places many countries in a quandary, forcing them to deal with this situation in different ways. Conserving water is the best way to prevent its shortage. This solution corresponds with the Islamic thought and indicates that Islam has predicted these problems thousands of years ago.

Moreover, Allah created everything in balance. Utilising natural resources in the wrong way can harm this balance. Allah said in The Quran: 'He created man and taught him clear expression. The sun and the moon both run with precision. The stars and trees bow down in prostration. He erected heaven and established the balance, so that you would not transgress the balance. Give just weight do not skimp the balance. "He" laid out the earth for all living creatures' (Al-Rahman: 3-9). This passage indicates that Allah created everything in balance. The abuse of natural resources can harm the balance of the environment. For example, environmental phenomena such as global warming and climate change are the result of the abuse of natural resources. These phenomena represent the imbalance of the environment. According to the Islamic thought, life is a complementary system. This system incorporates a number of interactions between its parts; these interactions can be affected by the destruction of the environment, which can have negative effects on the overall system. By maintaining the balance of natural resources, people can avoid environmental problems, which are unpredictable, and protect themselves.

Islam encourages the conservation of the environment because it is the only resource of life. Therefore, people have to protect the environment. Environmental resources come in different forms such as water, plants, animals, birds, places, air, and sea, among others. Utilising these resources is the right of all creatures. The right to benefit from the environment is linked to being accountable to it, as people are the only rational creatures on earth. The Islamic thought considers the people to be responsible for protecting the environment. Our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'The benefit of thing is in turn for the liability attached to it'. Allah forbids destroying the environment and orders the people to utilise it in the best way possible. According to Allah, 'And do good as Allah has been good to you. Moreover, do not seek to cause corruption in the earth. Allah does not love the corrupters' (Al- Qasas: 77). Destroying the environment is encroaching on the rights of future generations. The environment must be maintained as it was found. People should consider the future of the next generations, which also have the right to benefit from the environment. According to the Islamic thought, benefits from the environment should not be limited to some people. Instead, it should be the source of life for all people at all times.

The consumption behaviour in Islam depends on the efficient use of natural resources and the reduction of waste, which guarantees the good condition of the environment. According to Allah, 'Eat and drink, but waste not be excess' (Al-araf: 31). Reducing waste can benefit the environment in different ways. For instance, waste reduction reflects the efficient use of natural resources. It also saves the environment from problems caused by waste pollution. Moreover, Islam urges people to clean their bodies, areas, and their surrounding environment. Islam forbids all types of excesses, whether in drinking, eating, and other activities. For instance, the irrational use of fertilisers and the disposal of industrial waste in natural surroundings without any treatment can damage natural resources, such as water and plants, as well as affect the fertility of soil.

3. Overview of Some Theories on Environmental Responsibility

Environmental responsibility has been widely debated in the literature. Theorists have proposed many theories on environmental responsibility. These theories vary in their view of corporate environmental responsibility. Every theory assigns a specific role to the organisation within the society. This role determines the environmental responsibility of the organisation. The next section discusses the most popular theories in the field of environmental responsibility.

3.1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Theories

Theories on CSR can be classified into four groups: instrumental theories, political theories, integrative theories, and ethical theories (Mele & Grriga, 2004; Ismail, 2009). Each group has its assumptions. Instrumental theories assume that the sole social responsibility of the organisation is wealth creation. Political theories emphasise the social power of the organisation, leading to the organisation's acceptance of social duties. Integrative theories are based on the assumption that the existence, continuity, and growth of business depend on the society in which the company operates. Based on this assumption, integrative theories consider CSR as a cornerstone of the company, and the company must be responsible if it wants to survive. Ethical theories assume that companies adopt CSR because of ethical obligation (Mele & Garriga, 2004).

3.2. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was originally proposed by Freeman (1984). It states that companies should be operated in ways that are sustainable. In other words, companies should be accountable not only to the shareholders but also to the broader set of stakeholders. The theory developed in response to the economic theory of the firm, and it is contradictory to theory E, which assumes that economic value is dramatically and quickly enhanced by restructuring tough, results-driven actions such as payoffs and closing facilities (www.wikipedia.org). Flak and Dertz (2005) point out that stakeholder theory is primarily a management instrument; the attributes of power, urgency, and legitimacy of claims define the organisation's stakeholders. The theory assumes that an organisation can enhance the interests of its stockholders without damaging the interests of its wider stakeholders. Therefore, it considers both group stockholders and individual stakeholders.

3.3. Legitimacy Theory

One of the most cited theories within corporate environmental responsibility (CER) is the legitimacy theory. It is considered part of a larger system, for example, the society. Therefore, for various parts of the system to operate, organisations need to fit within the framework or setting of the larger system. Wajdi (2008) notes that, as regards legitimacy theory, organisations strive to strike a balance between their actions and how they are perceived by outsiders, and what the society considers to be appropriate. Legitimacy theory suggests that organisations undertake CER to legitimise their continual existence to stakeholder (Lodhia, 2004). In other words, companies should consider the environmental aspects when they operate; otherwise, they will be rejected by the society. Tark and Oskana (2008) mention that the organisations' failure to meet the social expectations can put the social license of the organisations at risk.

3.4. Islamic View of Environmental Responsibility

The Quran and Sunnah are the sources of Islamic thought. Sharieha is the guide of the Muslim people. In Islam, the determination of what is beneficial and what is harmful cannot be left to human reasoning. Thus, the Islamic Sharieha provides guidance to the people to determine these considerations. These principles influence the thinking and behaviour of 1.6 billion Muslims (Wajdi, 2008). The difference between the Islamic view and that of Western theories is that Islam thought represented in the Sharieha prioritizes the environment over all things and that Islam emphasises common interests over individual interests. Therefore, companies and individuals should protect and maintain the environment even if doing so will affect their specific interests. The Islamic view is superior to that of Western theories, which indicate that companies should protect the environment as part of protecting their interests in the environment. These interests in Western theories vary. For example, companies protect the environment to avoid complaints and fines, to attract customers, or to create wealth. In contrast to these theories, Islam thought offers a universal

spiritual view based on the Quran and Sunnah to present an alternative philosophical framework for man's interaction with the environment (Wajdi, 2008). When environmental responsibility becomes a religious duty, companies and individuals endeavour to protect the environment as a response to a religious order. This response is combined with the strong motivation to please Allah.

4. Levels of Environmental Responsibility and the Islamic Role at These Levels

In the business world, companies vary in the degree to which they conserve the environment. The response of laws and social duties to the environment varies from one company to another. The following sections illustrate these levels.

4.1. Irresponsible

This level is an extreme situation depicting a firm's behaviour. The company in this situation does not respect the environment. The irresponsibility of the company can be represented by issues such as fraud, misrepresentation of accounting statements, fraud, dumping of toxic wastes, false advertising, and so on.

4.2. Minimalist

Maximising shareholder value and profit is the primary goal of companies at this level. The company complies with the minimum requirements of legislation. Likewise, it may engage in some environmental activities.

4.3. Apathetic

Companies at this level operate within the law and are committed to the mandatory ethical responsibilities. These responsibilities can be represented by doing what is right and avoiding harm. The company's participation in other social and environmental activities, such as altruistic and philanthropic ones, is minimal. This level is called apathetic because the company exerts no strategic effort to engage in CSR issues.

4.4. Tactical

Companies at this level fulfil their social responsibilities voluntarily and compulsorily, benefiting them in both short term and long term. The companies' reputation is enhanced, eventually securing them long-term profits.

4.5. Taqwa-centric

At this level, companies conduct their environmental activities voluntarily regardless of the financial consequences, whether positive or negative. In this stage, the motivation to engage in environmental activities is related to religious duty. This religious duty is more important than profit or the companies' reputation. Companies engage in environmental activities even if these activities will harm their finances. This example represents the Islamic view of environmental responsibility. It is superior to all other theories. The following figure presents the levels of environmental responsibility:

5. Conclusion

Although the word 'environment' is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran, the issues related to the environment appear 155 times in different suras in the Quran. The Islamic view of the environment extends to all things found on the grounds of the earth and in the atmosphere. Environmental protection is important in the Quran and Sunnah. Islam considers the people to be responsible for any damage done on earth. Therefore, people should protect the environment and conserve the natural resources. Maintaining the balance of the natural resources is the only way to guarantee survival. Whereas Western theories consider environmental protection a response to external forces and the achievement of special interests, Islam believes that environmental protection is the only way to maintain the balance of life. It integrates the concept of environmental conservation into the philosophy of Muslims. By doing so, the people can lessen their actions that damage the environment to guarantee the right of future generations to benefit from the natural resources.

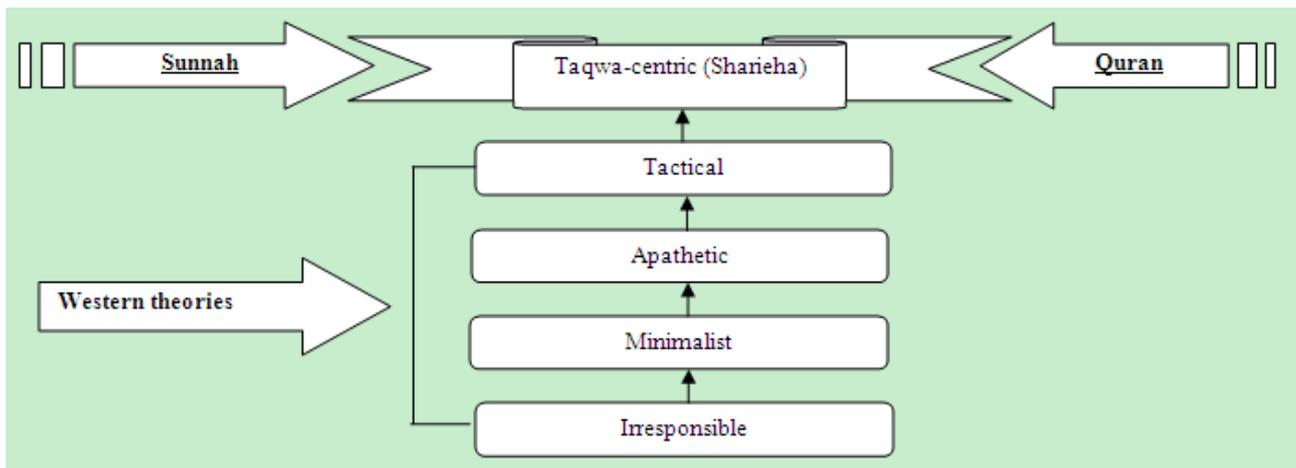


Fig. 1: Levels of environmental responsibility

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