What does Quran say about the Environment?

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More than 800 verses directly or indirectly talk of the environment (universe and Creation). Among them 500 verses in the Qur'an deal directly with nature, the environment and natural phenomena. Those verses call on believers to reflect on the wonders of nature and to consider the perfect balance in which Allah maintains the natural world. In the Quran, man is described as God's vicegerents on Earth. God created nature in balance and mankind's responsibility is to maintain this balance through wise governance and sound personal conduct. Humans are guardians of God's Creation (Quran 6:165), and we should not create disorder (Quran 30:40)

Nature and environment have always played an important part in the lives of Muslim peoples. Muslims understand that God has not created all this for nothing. In fact, they have been commanded to find the wonderful signs of God around them so that they will only increase them in their awe of their Cherisher (God).

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day- there are indeed Signs for men of understanding men who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth (with the thought): “Our Lord! not for nothing have You created (all) this! Glory to You! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire Quran 3.190-1.

Islam tells all Muslims have a responsibility to protect the environment. Islam says God created all things in perfect balance and measurement. There is a purpose behind all things, including, living and non-living, and each species has its role to play in the balance. God gave human beings know ledges, which allows them to use the natural world for their needs. Muslims believe that all living things, including human beings, are servants to God Alone. Thus, we are not masters who rule over the earth, but servants of God with a responsibility.

According to Quran, men and women are viewed as God's vicegerents on Earth. (2:30) God created nature in a balance and mankind's responsibility is to maintain this fragile equilibrium through wise governance and sound personal conduct.

The Quran also describes the believing men and women as those who "walk on the Earth in humility" (25:63). It means that Muslims are to protect nature's many bounties given to them by the Almighty. Preservation is a commandment from God.

There are so many chapters (surahs) in the Quran are titled animals or natural phenomena which indicate the importance of environmental issues in Islam.64

Scientists believe that man is the major factor in disturbing the natural balance of the universe. Man interferes intentionally or unintentionally in the earth's ecosystems by damaging its perfect and precise order. Many dangers are manifested in pollution of the air, water, soil, outer space and others, as well as the irrational exploitation of the environment's resources. All these factors have lead to disturbance the earth's natural balance.

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64 - Such as ... Al-Baqarah The Cow, Al-An'am The Cattle, Ar-Ra'd The Thunder, Ar-Rahd The Bee, An-Noor The Light, An-Nāṣr The Victorious, Al-'Imārah The Spider, Al-Tauz The Mountain, Al-Noor the Star, Al-Qurūb The Moons, Al-Burāq the Constellation of Stars, Al-Tāriq the Night Star, Al-Fajr the Dawn, Al-Shams the Sun, Al-Layl The Night, Al-Dhāhā The Morning, Al-Yaum the Day, and Al-Fajr the Elephant.
There are so many verses in the Quran that try hard to encourage believers to reflect on nature.

"Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for people of understanding." (Quran 4:190)

For example, the Quran states: "And it is He who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers; and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two; He draweth the night as a veil over the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider." (15:3)

According to Islamic beliefs, the Earth is a sanctuary in which mankind was made to dwell in comfort. The vast oceans, forests and mountains that make up this bountiful planet have been subdued by God for our enjoyment and productive use.

**Quran & respect to nature**

According to scientists man is considered as the major factor in disturbing the natural balance of the universe. Man interferes intentionally or unintentionally in the earth's ecosystems. Environment has been facing a severe threat. Grave dangers are manifested in pollution of the air, water, soil, outer space and others.

Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part
of what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]. [30, 41]

There are numerous examples of disturbances to the environment. So many forests have been removed, deserts have been encroached upon, and many species of plants and animals have disappeared throughout the world. The rivers are polluted with undesirable chemicals and toxicants, underground water is being depleted and getting polluted. Forests are being lost at an alarming rate resulting in environmental degradation. A balance in oxygen and water in the environment is being lost, which is so important to sustain and preserve the human civilization on the planet earth. All these affect the macro-environment because it is an integrated whole.

God compels Muslims in the Quran to respect and revere the environment when He says, "Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth." (40:57)

According to the Qur'an everything in the natural world is a sign (ayat) of God and as such it is continuously praising Him. Environment is a sign (ayat) that points to God. In short, the universe, with all its causal processes, is the prime sign (ayat) and proof of its Maker. Then, it is a sacred duty to protect and preserve the nature. Nature is regarded as the grand handiwork of the Almighty, but it does not exist just to show off His might and power. It is to serve human beings.

So, when we look at the Qur'an's general attitude towards the universe, natural resources, and the relation between human beings and nature we find out that: The main purpose of human beings is nothing else but to serve God, to be grateful to Him, and to worship Him alone. Nature exists for human beings to use it and benefit from it. However, human beings are invited to use this opportunity for the good and not to "corrupt the earth".

Moreover the Qur'an speaks frequently of the perfect order in the universe as proof not only God's existence but also of His unity. That is known as the "cosmological evidence of God's existence" in the philosophy. No doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qur'an in this reflective observation of nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that of which nature is regarded a symbol.

According to the Qur'an, even stones can serve to express the aspects of Divine Wrath. Moreover, when the Qur'an refers to the "stoning" of disobedient people, employs an allegorical language, which implies some moral principles and lessons to be taken from the natural world in general, and from the stones in particular:

Thenceforth were your hearts hardened: they became like a rock and even worse in hardness. For among rocks there are some form which rivers gush forth; others there are which when split asunder send forth water; and others which sink for fear of God. And God is not unmindful of what ye do. [2:74]

One may even ask, "what is the significance of discussing and explaining certain natural states of rocks which are commonplace and everyone knows about as though they were the most important and significant matters?"

Qur'an is also a book of guidance for both educated and ordinary people. Therefore, it employs a simple language to guide people to the universal truths and profound and general principles. The main purpose of the Qur'an while referring to the stoning of hearts has moral implications and lessons to be taken therein.

Nature & responsibilities

When we look at the natural world, we see that even rocks and mountains have given special roles and responsibilities according to the Qur'an. The creation of the universe, however, was a serious affair. In the Qur'an mountains are also regarded as obedient to Divine orders so that they keep the earth stable. Thus, mountains
are, like other creatures, signs of God's omnipresence; they prostrate themselves before God along with all other creatures.[22:18]

Water also has an important role in the Qur'anic teaching. Water, for example, regarded as the source of life. We have created alive everything through water. [21:30] "God is one, who sends water down from the sky... [16:10-11]

The verses about rains, rivers, wind and other natural phenomena can be found in the Qur'an and all of them have been regarded as the signs of God. While rain was sent down to quicken the dead earth [41:39], the wind, which comes as a promise of His Mercy[7:57], is responsible to announce the arrival of rain. It also so obedient to God's Will and Power it carried Solomon's throne.[34:12] The winds! According to the testimony of their otherwise, generous benefits and duties, they are hastening to extremely numerous and important tasks. It means that movement in waves is a being employed, a being dispatched, a being utilized by an All-Wise Maker.

Ethical conduct toward nature has been an essential part of any society. The environmental crisis demands new ethics principles. Our current environmental crises are caused by a complex set of interlinked unethical behavior. It is because of a shift from equilibrium to excess or defects, has resulted in global catastrophes such as acid rain, air pollution, global warming, hazardous waste, ozone depletion, smog, water pollution, rain forest destruction, desertification, ecosystem destruction and extinction. It is not a matter of lack of technology but rather a lack of sound philosophy and guiding principles that has led humanity to swim in a pool of pollution.

According to the Qur'an, these crises can be explained as: "Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of the work that the hands of men have earned. That God may give them a taste of the consequences of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back from wrong ways." (Quran 30:41) Islam prohibits waste, destruction and pollution and guides human behavior to respect their environment. Muslims recognize that the environment belongs to God, and thus we as Muslim look to this world and environment as a holy and sacred place. Hence, it is an obligation to delineate this path of environmental ethics based on the Islamic paradigm.

God-centric approach

Islam considers God-centric approach to any issue. Because, the nature or environment is a creation of God. So, any deviation from natural way is a divergence from the way of God. Quran clearly states "Do not transgress the balance" (55:8) and "There is to be no change in the creation of God" (30:30).

This natural way is a Quranic concept that takes into account the harmony in creation and the balance that exists between living and nonliving creatures. However, God made human responsible to care for the creatures of God. God made humans responsible as his vicegerent in the Quran. The word vicegerent does not reflect ownership for humans, but rather a role of a manager or a guardian. The Quran declares: "It is God who has created for you all that is on earth..."

Islam is a comprehensive way of life. It offers human beings not only a connection to their environment but also to their creator.

In brief:
Humans are guardians of God's Creation (Quran 6:165), and we should not create disorder/pollution (Quran 30:40) - especially as