

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGICAL BALANCE IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Abstract

In Islamic thought, the relation of human with his environment is arranged besides the relation of human with human. There is so much advice, a great many rules and bans in this issue in Qurán ayahs and in the saying of the Prophet (hadith), which are two basic sources of Islam. According to Islam, everything on the earth, including physical environment was created so that human being could benefit from it. However, it doesn't mean that human being has a limitless freedom while benefitting from these blessings. He should be respectful to the environment while benefitting from it, protect it and should not use it wastefully. In other words, human being should make a connection with the physical environment by paying attention to the continuation of ecological balance. In the current study, the place of ecological balance in Islamic thought was investigated in the light of Qurán ayahs and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad of Islam. Content analysis and data analysis techniques were used as a method.

Key Words: Islam, ecology, environment, balance.

İSLAM DÜŞÜNCESİNDE ÇEVRE VE EKOLOJİK DENGE

Özet

İslam düşüncesinde sadece insanın insan ile değil; aynı zamanda insanın çevre ile olan ilişkileri de düzenlenmiştir. İslam'ın iki temel kaynağı olan Kur'ân ayetlerinde ve peygamberin sözlerinde (hadis) bu konuya ilişkin çok sayıda öneri,

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kural ve yasak vardır. İslam'a göre, fiziksel çevre de dâhil olmak üzere dünyadaki her şey, insan onlardan yararlınsın diye yaratılmıştır. Ancak insan çevresindeki bu nimetlerden yararlanırken sınırsız bir özgürlüğe sahip değildir. O, bu nimetlerden yararlanırken çevreye saygı göstermeli, onu korumalı ve kendi hizmetine sunulan varlıkları hoyratça tüketmemelidir. Diğer bir deyişle insan, ekolojik dengenin devamını gözeterek fiziksel çevresiyle ilişki kurmalıdır. Bu çalışmada, Kur'an ayetleri ve İslam peygamberi Hz. Muhammed'in sözleri ışığında, ekolojik dengenin İslam düşüncesindeki yeri tartışılmıştır. Yöntem olarak içerik analizi ve veri yorumlama teknikleri kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam, ekoloji, çevre, denge.

Purpose

The basic aim of the current study was that Islamic thought pays an attention to environment and ecology and that human being adopts an attitude towards adapting to the environment he lives in and being respectful to it. In this sense, depending on the basic reference sources of Islam, it was aimed to set forth the importance given with regard to the value of environment and human's living in his environment harmoniously, in Islamic thought.

Methodology

This paper has been studied by qualitative methodology. There are two main sources of Islamic thought: one of them ayah (God's says) and the other one is hadith (The prophet of Islam/Mohammed's says). In this study, the ideas of Islam about the environment and ecological balance depend on both sources. In addition, while writing this article, content analysis and data comment techniques were used and the texts were examined in a critical way.

Introduction

The religion of Islam is a religion of balance in every aspect. Islam advises its members to stay away from extremity and become an ummah following the moderate way. In a Qur'an ayah it is said that "Thus, have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves" (Quran, 2/143). In another ayah, it is said that "O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters". (Quran, 7/31)

The Prophet Mohammad said that “Stay away from extremity; since those living before you were perished as they forced themselves in the religion to exceed the limits so being perished” (Al-Nasai, 3044).

As is clear in these ayahs and hadith, Islam recommended Muslims to stay away from extremism and live in a balance. It is also true for his relation with the environment. According to Islam, he should live in the harmony with the environment.

The Relation between Human and Environmental Balance in Islam

What is meant with environment is the natural environment where human being and all other living things live. The environmental problems depending on this are the distortion of natural environment, extinction of animal species and pollution of the nature (Ozdemir, 2011:1).

Allah says in Qurán that “Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure.” (Quran, 54/49). Thus, according to Islam, the distortion of ecological balance and environmental problems are as a result of the fact that human being does not comply with the divine order designed by Allah. Degradation of environment is given in another Qurán ayah like this: “Mischiefs have appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil).” (Qurán, 30/41).

Allah made the earth fertile and productive. What human being should do is to benefit from these gifts granted to him by way of the earth and also prevent it to be harmed and wiped out. In other words, human being should not behave against the balance on earth. It is said in Qurán that “And the earth We have spread out (like a carpet); set there on mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.” (Qurán, 15/19).

Allah clarified in the introduction ayahs of the surah Rahman in Qurán that He created the universe and the world in a balance, He created a lot of blessings for human being to benefit and explained that human being should not distort the justice and balance he is in relation with “The Most Gracious! It is He Who has taught the Qurán. He has created man: He has taught him an intelligent speech. The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed; And the herbs and the trees - both (alike) bow in adoration. And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice), In order that ye may not transgress (due)

balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures: Therein is fruit and date-palms, producing spathes (enclosing dates); Also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and sweet-smelling plants. Then which of the favors of your Lord will ye deny?" (Qurán, 55/ 1 – 13).

Islam and Environmental Awareness

Allah laid down many conditions for the faith to Him. Therefore, according to Islam, a person saying that he believes in Allah does not mean his faith is complete. Believing in Allah means accepting all His commands. These commands were presented by means of Kur'ân ayahs and the sayings of the Prophet and are on the claim to design the lives of people and communities in a way not to exclude anything. Among them are the responsibilities for Allah as well as the responsibilities for other people, animals and the environment he lives in. Izutsu explained the relation between these responsibilities of human being and faith like that (2001: 24 – 25): one of the provisions of having real faith for a person is to see all the beings in the nature around him not a simple good but the gifts given by Allah to human being.

In Islam, everything existed in the universe was created by Allah on purpose. This is given in Qurán like that "Praise be Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made the Darkness and the Light. Yet those who reject Faith hold (others) as equal, with their Guardian-Lord". (Qurán, 6/1). Allah created human being together with other beings in the universe. Therefore, he has some responsibilities against other beings which were created together with him, sharing the same world. It is told in Qurán like that "There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have We omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end." (Qurán, 6/38) In this ayah, it is clearly told to human being that every kind of living thing has a community like man, so having some rights.

The Responsibilities of Human Being with Regard to Environmental and Ecological Systems in Islam

In Islamic thought, such kinds of responsibilities were laid on human being regarding environment, and animals and ecological systems in line with it in an itemized way:

1. First of all, nature is not the property of human being but of Allah. Therefore, human being should not act as the ruler of nature, but the user and warden of it. Human being could sometimes interfere in nature within certain rules and change it. However, human being has to obey the ethical rules during this relation. In order that human being could behave nature deservedly, it is necessary for him to understand it completely. That's why; he has to search for the laws and arrangements comprising the nature (Serdar, quoted from Faruqi, 1994: 213 – 249).

2. Almighty Allah giving the earth for the service human being with what it has also entrusted it to human being with all its belongings. This entrustment is a hard and heavy one. It is told in Qurán like this "We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; -He was indeed unjust and foolish-" (Qurán, 33/72). This entrustment is the responsibility of being a human, which was first offered to the heavens, then to the earth. In this entrustment is the responsibility of being a desired servant. This responsibility includes human's behaving well for himself and other beings around him within the framework determined by Allah. In addition, Allah made warnings in many surah in Qurán. If he did not care for the entrustment and follow his lacking sides, illiterate and cruel ones, inherent in his own nature, he would be punished "Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it." (Qurán, 99/ 7 – 8).

3. "It is He Who sendeth down rain from the skies: with it We produce vegetation of all kinds: from some We produce green (crops), out of which We produce grain, heaped up (at harvest); out of the date-palm and its sheaths (or spathes) (come) clusters of dates hanging low and near: and (then there are) gardens of grapes, and olives, and pomegranates, each similar (in kind) yet different (in variety): when they begin to bear fruit, feast your eyes with the fruit and the ripeness thereof. Behold! in these things there are Signs for people who believe." (Qurán, 6/99).

It is He Who sends down rain from the sky: from it ye drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which ye feed your cattle." (Qurán, 16/10). As given in these ayahs and in some other ayahs, Allah granted human being countless blessings through nature. These blessings are of crucial importance in terms of human being. Thus, he should appreciate these blessings and thank for Allah for

them. In addition, human being should protect the environment that mediates in reaching these blessings and should approach it respectfully.

4. "Whoever plants trees, Allah will give him reward to the extent of their fruit" (Muslim, Musakat: 7 – 8).

"If any of you have a date sapling on the doomsday he should plant it -if possible." (Bukhari al- Adab-ul Mufrad).

"There are seven things of which merits reach the person even after his death: the science learned, water fountain flowing for the benefit of people, a water well dug, a sapling planted, a masjid built, Kur'ân donated to be recited, dutiful child that would pray him after his passing away" (Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 5/415).

The Prophet of Islam recommended planting a sapling clearly and strongly in the three hadiths given above. In many other hadith like these hadiths, planting trees are recommended. As planting trees is one of the most effective ways of fighting against erosion, the Prophet of Islam was one of the most significant heroes of fighting against erosion; since planting trees to fight against erosion has never been stated by institutions and people in such a strong way. In particular, in the second hadith, even if people were in a rush just in the doomsday, they were recommended to plant trees which are ready to plant. As for the third hadith, the tree planted was regarded as a valuable behavior that would benefit for the person even after his demise. So, planting trees and protecting environment in that way is one of the good behaviors praised by Islam.

5. As is known in the current time, a rapid change in climate changes has been experienced, clean water sources have been contaminated, green gas release has increased, underground water sources have been dried up and a great many natural disasters have been experienced. In the basis of all these troubles lies the abuse of the sources by human being and not interfering in this distortion. The case of not giving up unconscious and luxurious consumption has turned the world into a place hard to live in.

Whereas, Kur'ân warned humans one thousand four hundred year ago when these problems had not emerged yet in using the blessings of the world they have in a careful way: "...eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters." (Qurán, 7/31). "But squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Satans; and the Satan is to his Lord (himself) ungrateful." (Qurán, 17/ 26 – 27).

Ignoring all these warnings in Qurán, human being has been consuming the world and the environment in a very rapid way. In a Qurán ayah (30/41), it was told that earths and seas were distorted as a result of misbehavior of human being and that Allah will make human being experience some of the negative impacts of these misbehavior in order that they could draw a lesson. It would not be an unreasonable approach to interpret that the environmental problems experienced today are the realization of this ayah.

6. The Prophet initiated a strong act of environment after migrating to Medina. In that purpose, He made an effort for the forestation of a place known as "Zuraybu't-Taveel" and he said that "whoever cuts a tree from this place will plant another tree there" in order to compensate the tree cut with this provision. Therefore, this place became a forest in time (Sancaklı, No Date: 1). The Prophet declared an area twelve miles from the center of Medina to every direction as *forbidden zone* and banned to cut the trees, their leaves and plants there and to kill the animals.

Depending on this example, every Muslim should beautify the surrounding he lives in terms of environmental and living conditions. In addition, this case is not in the preference of Muslims. In other words, Muslims have to beautify the area they live in and protect the environment.

7. The sensibility of the Prophet of Islam to environment comprises animals. In a hadith related to Ibn Omar, the Prophet damned on those oppressing animals (Bukhari, Zebaih 25). In another hadith, "If someone kills a sparrow for sport, Allah will ask for it in the Day of Judgment" (Darimi, Sunan: 84).

In order to make people perceive the importance of behaving animals in a good way, the Prophet told a story to his friends around. A thirsty person went down a well to drink water and got rid of his thirstiness. While climbing up the well, he saw a dog in full thirst. He climbed down back to the well in order to bring that dog water and climbed up with his shoe full of water. Allah liked his behavior so much that He put this person into His paradise.

8. Other ecological acts of The Prophet Mohammad (Ayduz, 2012: 3): He applied a quarantine in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases (Bukhari Tib 30). He indicated that diseased animals should not be intermingled with healthy ones. He definitely banned on pissing down along the roads where people pass by and benefit from the shadow of the trees or on still waters. He ordered that everybody clean the front of their houses (Ibn Khayyim, 216). He encouraged

people to take away the things that disturb others passing by there (Muslim, Iman: 58). He put an importance on the protection of water, land and air. Besides all these things, he insistently forbade wasting things in vain and he even said that a person performing an ablution by a flowing river should not waste water so much (Ibn Mace, 197).

Results and Discussion

As a result of, in Islamic thought;

First of all, humans are not creator of the world, so they act as a user and as a guard of the environment, not like owner of it.

Secondly, environment and ecological system have been resigned to mankind; so, people protect them. In addition, mankind should approach it respectfully. If the people do not obey this rule, they will live a lot of crucial problems in their life.

Lastly, because of the planting trees is one of the most effective ways of fighting against erosion, planting trees are recommended by Islam. Moreover, the sensibility of the Islam to environment comprises animals.

Conclusion

It is likely to make addition to the ayahs and hadiths given above and underlining the importance that Islam gives to environment and ecological balance. However, it would be enough to make the issue clear. In short, Allah indicated that He created the universe of which human being is a part in a very perfect harmony and wanted human being to respect for this balance. Having a respect for this balance includes living in a harmonious way with the environment and protecting it. The sayings and applications of the Prophet are in line with the protection of the balance asked by ayahs. Therefore, Islam regards protecting environment and ecological systems as the continuation of the order in the universe and pays great important on it. Nevertheless, it is an unfortunate that the members of Islam today are far from this consciousness. The revision of the attitudes and approaches by Muslims and all humanity adopted by Islam in terms of environment, and adoption of Qurán ayahs and hadiths, which are the basic references of Islam, as a means of reference would be beneficial in producing constant and active solutions for current environmental problems.

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