

The Role of Human Beings as Caliphs in Preserving Nature in this Internet ERA

¹Firdaus Khairi Abdul Kadir, ²Noor Aisyah Abdul Aziz, ³Nazihah Rusli, ⁴Asyraf Hj Ab. Rahman, ⁵Abdul Hanis Embong, ⁶Hailan Salamun

¹²³⁵⁶Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Terengganu, Malaysia

Abstract

Islam is a comprehensive religion encompassing all aspects of society's life such as social, economic, political, cultural and environmental. The environment is part of the manifestation of God's greatness which has pearls of wisdom, bestowed upon human beings to make them realize that everything is in the hands of God (Allah SWT). However, the equilibrium of nature could be disturbed from the excessive exploitation by humans' hands. As a caliph on this earth, it is the responsibility of human beings to look after the environment proactively. Besides, Islam calls for the execution of accountable development and respecting the principles of sustainability. Therefore, this study focuses on the role of human beings as caliphs on this earth who are responsible for nature and their acts in conserving and preserving the environment. This study also used the research method of the survey library.

Keywords: environment, human beings, caliph, *tauhid* and Allah SWT.

Introduction

The entire universe falls under the control and direction of Allah SWT from the smallest things to the largest of His creatures whether it is can be seen by human beings or not. Muslims do believe in the existence of the invisible (*ghaib*) world which generally included other than angels, devils, the hereafter, heaven, hell and demon (*jinn*). The same goes with nature that is visible with the naked eyes such as water, plants, animals and so on that existed around human beings. Nevertheless, all of these are the creations of Allah SWT that made it with perfection in which nature and its contents have their place and role. Additionally, whereby just as Allah SWT created the gases in the air, the process of photosynthesis takes place, the existence of human beings, animals, plants and the circulation of the moon, sun and star in the universe beyond earth's atmosphere, for the sake of nature's equilibrium.

According to Miller (2002), the term environment refers to the whole of external factors and conditions that affects living organisms, for instance, air, water, light, animal, humans, the sun, and others. Meanwhile, the dictionary of Idris al-Marbawi (1998, p.40) defined nature with the meaning of “ما سوى الله”, which means “anything other than Allah SWT”. In this way, it can be concluded that the definition of nature from an Islamic perspective is all the creatures created by Allah SWT both visible and invisible things. Those creatures can be categorized into four; first, the creatures that can be seen with the sense of sights such as stone, wood, water, and others. Second, the creature which is cannot be seen with naked eyes but can be seen with a man-made device like a microscope, for example, atoms and bacteria. The third is the beings which are can be felt physically but cannot be seen with the eyes like wind, air, and electric current. Lastly, the creatures who are their

existence can be felt instinctively, however, not capable to be seen with any of the senses or any tools of humans' creation such as angels, devils, and demons (*jinn*).

Review of Literature

The Book of Allah SWT (al-Quran) highlighted that human beings as a special position among other of God's (Allah SWT) creations on earth since they are endowed with intellect (*'aql*) compared to other creatures. For this reason, they have been chosen as the representative in taking care of God's creation on this earth. This is stated by Allah SWT in surah al-Isra, verse 70, which says,

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْوَجْرِ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُم مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾^(٧٠)

"Indeed, We have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them far above many of Our creatures" (translated by Dr Mustafa Khattab).

Accordingly, as a caliph on this earth, human beings should obligate and act based on the decree of Allah SWT. They need to realize and be aware that even though Allah SWT made human beings the best of His creation, they also would become the lowest and dirtiest creature if they were unfaithful towards Allah SWT and His Messenger. It is proved in surah at-Tin, verse 4 until 6, which says,

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ ﴿٥﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٦﴾

"We have certainly created man in the best of stature; (4) Then We return him to the lowest of the low, (5) Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted" (6) (translated by Saheeh International).

Other than that, a human who has a strong belief in *tauhidiyyah* (oneness of Allah SWT) would be free from any challenges in fulfilling the *syariah* duties. They should be aware of their responsibility as

soon as Allah SWT has entrusted them with it and complete themselves with sufficient knowledge to comprehend the concept of the environment that would be governed. Al-Quran had mentioned in surah al-A'raf, verse 74, which says,

﴿وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ءَادِيوَاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِهَا قُصُورًا وَتَنْجَثُونَ الْجِبَالَ بُيُوتًا فَادْكُرُوا ءَالَءَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ﴾^(٧٤)

"And remember when He made you successors after the 'Aad and settled you in the land, [and] you take for yourselves palaces from its plains and carve from the mountains, homes. Then remember the favors of Allah and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption" (translated by Saheeh International).

Meanwhile, as sociable beings, human beings have the same ecology and biology for the continuation in life same as other beings. Also, the creature that tends to be completely dependent on Allah SWT should have a feeling of gratitude and a sense of responsibility to preserve the nature of God's (Allah) creation. This message is recorded in the Quran surah an-Naml, verse 31, which says,

﴿أَلَّا تَعْلَمُوا عَلَيَّ وَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ﴾^(٣١)

"Be not haughty with me but come to me in submission [as Muslims]" (translated by Saheeh International).

Moreover, the act of things that forbids by Allah SWT to the point of destroying well-created creations seems like showing the discourteous that is means disrespect towards Him; The Supreme. Human beings need to realize that everything that exists in this universe belongs to Allah SWT solely, not their explicit possession even though they are given the freedom to use natural resources. In addition, they cannot misuse all these natural resources beyond their expectations and needs. Allah SWT had reminded this matter in surah al-A'raf, verse 85, which says,

﴿وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مَوْمِنِينَ﴾^(٨٥)

"..and do not defraud people of their property, nor spread corruption in the land after it has been set in order. This is for

your own good, if you are ‘truly’ believer” (translated by Dr Mustafa Khattab).

The Quran had emphasized many times the role of human beings as caliphs in general, and particularly Muslims to bear the responsibility as guardian of the environment and then every action will be questioned on the Day of Judgement. Despite that, the disruption that happened nowadays that caused equilibrium in the ecosystem had proved there was too much environmental damage already. Even though for thousand years ago Islam had pointed out the importance of plants in preserving the environment and at the same time, able to reduce the effects of climate change. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad SAW had always forbidden his companions to destroy trees during the war as well as stressed the act of planting trees. The Prophet SAW had said in a hadith, which says, ‘there is no Muslim who plants a tree or sow seeds, and then a bird or a person or an animal eats from it but, is considered a charitable gift for him’ (Bukhari Hadith).

Furthermore, during the war also, Prophet Muhammad SAW distinctly prohibit the destruction of trees and plants because of its advantage to be used as shelter to the troops. It said in the previous hadith, the benefits of plants or trees are given to others unintentionally.

On the other hand, the climate change that occurs nowadays is one of the shreds of evidence in which the ones who are responsible for it had failed to carry out their duty. Industrialization had led to habitat destruction dramatically whereby forests are cut down for the wood and ecosystem were disturbed to create roads, strip mines, and gravel pits. Besides, tearing down these habitats could affect the local ecosystem and lead to the extinction of plants and animals since the species cannot migrate and adapt to the new environment. Human beings have often betrayed the warning and reminder about how important to keep their eyes open on this nature by committing

irresponsible acts. This situation had stated in the Quran surah ar-Rum, verse 41, which says,

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

“Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He [i.e., Allah] may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]” (translated by Saheeh International).

In the meantime, the combination of the concepts of tauhid (oneness of Allah SWT), *khilafah* (representative), and trust in the sustainable management of natural resources is supported by the Islamic perspective on environmental conservation (Maidin, 2007). The preservation of the environment should be understood as a religious order and every individual must be taken care of it. Then, religious worship (*ibadat*) which is done because Allah SWT solely includes effort in the management and conservation of the environment is considered as an act of good deeds and dignified to the point every good effort would be rewarded by Him. Meanwhile, the actions that are contrary to the religious teaching is not only caused damage to the environment but also certainly would face His wrath. The fact is, the environmental crisis that is happening today is due to human’s greed and their failure to fulfil their trust as the guardian of nature. According to Abd Rahman et al. (2018), the fade of responsible attitude towards environmental care is because of the lack of Islamic values’ appreciation related to the environmental management based on al-Quran and as-Sunnah. The current modernization has witnessed the extreme action of humans by damaging the creation of God for the sake of profit alone (Mohd Noor et al., 2012). Therefore, it is clear that preserving the sustainability of nature is the main challenge faced by human beings.

More than that, al-Quran which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad SAW is a complement to the Islamic law. Henceforth, Islam arises amid the world community to be the best solution for people (*ummah*) in this world. Human beings should put their effort into treating and preventing environmental damage by returning to the Islamic teaching as a perfect guide in their life in line with *Maqasid Syariah* (purpose of legislation). They can perform the sustainability of the environment with the guidance of Islam based on al-Quran. This matter is following what said by Prophet Muhammad SAW narrated by Abdullah bin Abbas in the book *FathuBarri* which says,

Meaning: Islam is the الإسلام يعلو ، ولا يُعلى على highest religion, nothing more than that.

Aside from that, Okour (2013) explained the three main areas that reflect the ethics of sustainable development; firstly, creating the equilibrium of the environment by appreciating its components, secondly, the value of environmental management that is focused on the human beings as a sole representative to look after the environment, and the third is the plan for the environment to protect the environment.

Next, the advantage of science and the role of the scientist in the development of new technology for the sake of protecting the environment also needed to be respected. Green technology is seen to be able to help minimize the negative effect on human activities as well as contribute to the Islamic civilization (Norizan et al., 2016). Islam has understood the importance of trees in protecting the environment and reducing the effect of climate change since thousands of years ago, and that is why Islam has outlined the rules regarding the aspect of environmental sustainability.

Methodology

The primary methodology used in this writing is a library research design that

uses the most relevant information from the secondary source. Data collection involved in this study is from books, Quran, hadith, articles, reports, and scholarly research; published both printed and online.

Result and Discussion

The caliph plays the primary role during the creation of human beings. Caliph (*khalifah*) comes from the word *khalafa* (خلف) which means to follow or comes after him, or the most accurate term is 'substitute'. The concept of the human being as a caliph on this earth can be summarized into five main characteristics; 1) representative (*khilafah*), 2) trust, 3) leadership (*qiyadah/siyadah*), 4) religious worship (*ibadah/ubudiyyah*), 5) trial (*ibtilla'*) (Rahman et al., 2018). Besides, humans should be fully responsible to manage, govern and protect the earth. However, humans are often betraying the warning and reminder on how important to look after nature by committing irresponsible acts. As caliphs of Allah SWT, human beings should manage the natural resources in an orderly manner. Despite that, the Quran itself has warned against excessive waste and exploitation being committed (Abdelzاهر et al., 2019).

On the other hand, according to al-Qaradawi (1995), regarding the environment, it is stated that nature is the gift from Allah SWT to all beings (*makhluk*) who inhabit it. Moreover, for Muslims, the appreciation towards the environment is better if they explore the various message entrusted by Allah SWT through the Quran. The Quran has described from the Islamic view the significance of nature as stated in surah az-Zumar, verse 21, which says,

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَلَكَهُ نَجِييحَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيَجُ فَتَرَاهُ
مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطْمًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرًا لِأُولِي
الْأَلْبَابِ (٢١)

"Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as

springs [and rivers] in the earth; then He produces thereby crops of varying colors; then they dry and you see them turned yellow; then He makes them [scattered] debris. Indeed, that is a reminder for those of understanding” (translated by Saheeh International).

Accordingly, the environment is inseparable from one’s faith in God with the manifestation that it can be seen from human behaviour, by emphasizing morality (*akhlak*) as a core of the relationship between humans, nature, and God (Haliza, 2019). These relationships are needed to be stressed comprehensively to maintain and preserve sustainable development. Islam teaches its *ummah*, they are encouraged to use everything that is created in this universe properly and do not treat it carelessly which could lead to disaster in the future. However, behind those favors, lurks a test from Allah SWT to measure to which extent the nature of human trust to live in a way that pleases Allah SWT and their efforts to maintain the harmonious environment.

On top of that, know that Allah SWT has appointed human beings as caliphs on this earth so that they are responsible to maintain harmonious nature and look after the environment proactively. As well, the whole earth has been created to be a place of worship, clean and holy. For this reason, it is an obligation to human beings to preserve the natural resources wisely and thoughtfully considered that Allah SWT had given them exclusively the right to use and utilize its resources. Therefore, Allah SWT has created natural resources as a necessity to human beings not for them to be arrogant or feel proud yet, for the aim to human beings know the meaning of gratitude as well as able to be humbler in their selves (be more piety, *taqwa*).

Conclusion

Indeed, this beautiful universe has given many benefits to the alive beings as well as the dead. For the living, the benefits are

very clear as proof of the existence of God (Allah SWT), and human beings subsequently would be worshipped themselves to Allah SWT in addition to seeking worldly reward as the reservation for the hereafter. Meanwhile, for the dead, the earth has made its land continue to be fertile for the others being in a way they could carry on with their life. Thus, all of those events are proof of His power over everything in this world. If human beings observe further, they would notice that there are many messages from Allah SWT about preserving and maintaining the environment yet, they do not give serious attention in taking care of their relationship with the environment instead, they are one of the reasons that contributed to the damage and destruction of nature.

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