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ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SIKHISM AND ISLAM: TEACHINGS FROM THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB AND THE QURAN

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Abstract

Since the dawn of human civilization, the environment has played a vital role in the survival of mankind. The planet Earth has favourable conditions and abundant resources, making it a living planet. Maintaining equilibrium in the environment while interacting with its elements has been challenging since the very beginning. The magnitude of this problem that we are facing in the 21st century is unprecedented. Although debate revolving around the protection and conservation of the environment was present in the 18th century, it gained new life after the Stockholm Declaration in 1972. The relationship between man and the environment was never as complex as it is in the modern era. With the advancement of science and technology, there was massive industrialization which called for excessive and unjust exploitation of natural resources. Earlier, religion played an important role in shaping and guiding the activities of mankind. Every aspect of man's life was ordered by religion, and his interaction with nature was no exception to this rule. Islam and Sikhism hold the credit for bringing the attention of mankind to the words "environmental protection". Islam has a duty-bound attitude that motivates mankind, particularly its followers, to be responsible while interacting with nature. The Quran provides that: *it is he who has made you viceroys on earth (Fatir verse 39)*. The concept of Khilafah/viceroy in the Quran makes mankind accountable for his actions despite the fact that man is the deputy of God on earth. Hence, he has to ensure that the equilibrium of nature is not disturbed. The Guru Granth Sahib has beautifully highlighted the significance of nature in the following words: "*Pavan gurū pāṇī pītā māṭā dharaṭ mahat*" (Guru Granth Sahib. ang.8). It means that Air is considered as the Guru, Water as the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all. These principles mentioned in Sikhism and Islam seem relevant even today. The concept of intergenerational equity and sustainable development is the bedrock of modern international environmental law and concurrence with the broad principles conceived in the Quran and the Guru Granth. Religious injunctions, if not divorced, may serve as motivation for the people to obey the environmental law, which is hitherto not observed in full spirit. This paper will attempt to discuss environmentalism from the perspective of Islam and Sikhism.

Keywords: Earth, Environment, Environmental Pollution, Justice, Mankind, Nature, Sustainable Development.

Methodology

This study is doctrinal research that is analytical and expository in nature. It will involve examining primary and secondary sources of law. The primary sources include holy books of Islam and Sikhism and judicial pronouncements. The secondary sources include articles, journals, commentaries, reports, news items, and opinion editorials, amongst others.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is the time when environmental pollution has reached its record high. Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused “global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase over 2010-2019, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and between individuals” (IPCC, 2023). In 2025, the world's CO₂ emissions from industrial operations and the burning of fossil fuels increased by +0.7% (Deng et al.). Since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the exploitation of natural resources has started on a massive scale. The materialistic greed of man turned him against nature. With the help of science and technology, he has achieved the heights of development. Life expectancy has increased dramatically, irrigation channels have made droughts now rare, and the Green Revolution has made the earth produce more and more (“Life Expectancy around World Shows Dramatic Rise”). But these blessings have not been without a price. Mankind has to pay a very heavy price in terms of environmental pollution. Deforestation is done to increase the agricultural acreage. There is massive use of herbicides and pesticides, which has resulted in serious health effects in infants and children, who are highly vulnerable to deleterious effects due to inadequate application of these (Mahmood, et al.). “All creatures are equal for the earth but as human beings have been doing for the last few centuries, and, presently also have been making the precious lives of many species extinct by creating unlivable conditions for them by clearing the jungles and poaching wantonly, it is not improper and impossible that one day this planet Earth will become annoyed with its inhabitants and will go on without man itself” (Harvard Divinity Bulletin). Nature lovers like *Rachel Carson*, through her work “*Silent Spring*”, tried to awaken world leaders and sensitize them about the destruction that is at our doorstep (Carson). Fortunately, world leaders have also realized the illness of the environment and have declared their resolve to develop sustainably and utilize the resources, keeping in view the future generation. “We live in an era in the history of nations when there is a greater need than ever for coordinated political action and responsibility” (Brundtland Commission). Concepts like polluter pays and precautionary principles have gained recognition at the global stage (Rio Declaration). Terms like the millennium and sustainable development goals may seem new, but the ethos of these can be traced back to our religious texts also. Modern law is not the only law which is talking about environmental protection; if we look back at the history of mankind, such ruthless treatment was not directed towards Mother Earth because religion also has a major role in modifying the behaviour of mankind while interacting with the environment. Islam is the oldest religion that talks about the environment. The Quran has multiple times addressed man and guided him on how to interact with nature; it also has a duty-based attitude towards environmental protection. Every creature on this planet has the inherent right to exploit the resources for its survival, and mankind is under an obligation not to disturb the equilibrium while interacting with nature. “Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality, and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.” (Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment). The concept of *Khilafah* is the essence of Islamic environmentalism. It means deputy or vice-regent of God. God says: *It is he who has made you viceroys on earth* (Quran 35:39). The Quran gave the title of khalifa to mankind. The term itself means that man is not the owner of the earth but is the deputy. Humans have to accept the sovereignty of the creator of the universe and act according to the will of such a sovereign. Humans are under the obligation to be just while interacting with the environment. In addition to Islam, Sikhism, which is a relatively new religion, has given a specific and frequent sermon to humans about the importance of the environment and our responsibilities while interacting with it. Our ecosystems are internally bound with each other, and there is a binding force that is working among them, which has been denoted as *quadrat*

in the Guru Granth Sahib. Several verses praise the beauty of nature. The Guru Granth Sahib has beautifully said: *Pavan gurū pāṇī piṭā māṭā dharat mahat* means “Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all” (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang.8), which teaches us to protect, preserve and respect them all. This *shloka* (verse) highlights the sensitivity of Sikhism towards the environment.

2. Sacred Ecology in Sikhism

It is humans' sense of religion and other things' rationality that make them more developed than other creatures on the earth, which is why humans have to be more ethical and responsible. As per the Sikh scripture, the human being is on earth to attain a blissful life by creating harmony with other creatures of this planet. But things are happening contrary to it; the earth is at the peak of an environmental crisis, and all these are due to the exploitation of humans. The air is considered “*Pavan Gurū*”, but today the air contains various pollutants like carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and many others. And water is considered “*pāṇī piṭā*,” but nowadays, domestic waste, food processing waste, insecticides, and industrial waste contaminate the water. The earth, which is considered as “*māṭā dharat mahat*”, the great mother, is facing the worst of toxic chemicals in the soil due to agricultural and industrial activities.

Such environmental crises show that human beings have gone far away from their ethical values. The race to achieve more and more is the reason for the exploitation of the earth and its other living beings. So such a crisis requires urgent solutions; this is the time to go back to the basics. Every human needs to introspect on why they are on earth, and what the purpose of being in this universe. The concern about the environment and its creatures is shown by Sikh gurus and in Sikh beliefs. Every creation in this universe has the same origin and end; all are created by one creator, so they must live their life in harmony with each other.

2.1. Importance of Air, Water, and Earth

Air, water, and soil are the three most important elements that make human survival possible on Earth. But unfortunately, all three components are degrading day by day. Polluted air contains one or more hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants that create a hazard to general health. “The main pollutants found in the air we breathe include particulate matter, PAHs, lead, ground-level ozone, heavy metals, sulfur dioxide, benzene, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide” (Khan). Water pollution is the other major concern in India. The rivers are the primary source of drinking water for towns and cities in our country, but rivers are polluted by urbanisation, industrial pollution, withdrawal of groundwater, improper agricultural practices, and religious and social practices (Divan and Rosencranz). Supreme Court, deriving inspiration from the resolution of the United Nations Organization during the United Nations Water Conference, 1977, in *Narmada Bachao Andolan v. Union of India and others*, held that drinking water is of primary importance in this country. Water is a basic need for the survival of human beings and is a part of the right to life and human rights as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The right to drinking water is fundamental to life, and there is a duty on the State under Article 21 to provide clean drinking water to its citizens (*Narmada Bachao Andolan v. Union of India*). In Granth Sahib, various verses emphasized the great importance of air, water, and earth. These three are considered the creation of the one creator as equally important as the other living beings of this universe.

“*Paṇ pāṇī dharatī ākās ghar mandar har banī*”(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 723).

This means air, water, and sky; these three are the home and temple of God himself. So these are sacred places of his grace, which means a human is duty-bound to protect them. And in *Japji Sahib*, Guru Nanak specifically quoted that Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all (Thind and Khalsa). A similar principle finds an echo in the Stockholm Declaration that “the natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna, and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate” (Stockholm Declaration).

2.2. Guru Nanak's Concept of Nature

Baba Nanak laid down the foundation of the Sikh religion. He was the first guru among the ten living gurus of Sikhs. Nanak, in his Gurbani, wrote much about nature. He spoke about the creation of this universe and praised the beauty of nature in his hymns.

In *Raga Bilawal*, Guru Nanak quoted that-

“*Āpe sach kīā kar jor*
Andaj for jor vichhor
Dharat akās kīe baisan ka-o thā-o
Rāt dinant kīe bhā-o bhā-o”(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang.839).

God himself created the whole of nature by joining the elements together. Breaking the cosmic egg, He united and separated. He made the earth and the sky into places to live. He created day and night, fear and love (Sri Guru Granth Sahib 2008).

And in *Asa Di War*, many verses praise the beauty of nature. These are explained as-

“*Kudrat jāī jinsī rangī kudrat jī-a jahān*
Kudrat pa-un pānī baisantar kudrat dharatī khāk”

Species of different kinds, colours, and other living beings exist on Earth. “By His Power wind, water, and fire exist; by His Power earth and dust exist” (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang.464). So everything on earth is a creation of God, human has no right to exploit them.

“*Andaj jeraj ut-bhujān khānī setjānh*”

As per Guru Granth Sahib, there are four sources of creation: “born of eggs, born of the womb, born of the earth, and born of sweat” (Guru Granth Sahib). Gurbani gives equal place to the womb and the earth, human has no right to pollute them for their greed.

“*Balihārī kudrat vasiā*
Terā ant na jāī lakhīā”

In these beautiful verses, it is expressed that the creator of the universe, whose end cannot be found, is living in Nature (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang.469). Hence, humans should not disturb it. Marine and coastal biodiversity is recognised today in the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015- 2030 mentioned the protection of life below the water. Goal 14 provides that “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” (SDG 14). But Guru Nanak, in his Gurbani, gave recognition to it long ago. He said, “*Pahilā pānī jī-o hai jit hariā sabh ko-e*” (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang. 472). This means there is life in the water, which is the basis of all life, flora, and fauna; due to water, everything is green (Guru Granth Sahib). So we have to utilize water carefully.

In the most harmonious Gurbani *Kirtan Sohila*, Guru Nanak expressed-

“*Gagan mai thāl rav chand dīpak bane tārīkā mandal janak moī.*
Dhūp malānlo pavan chavro kare sagal banrā-e fūlant joī”(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang. 13).

Says that the whole universe and its nature mean the entire cosmos, making worship of the creator. This worship must go on without the interruption of human activities. “Upon that cosmic plate of the sky, the sun and the moon are the lamps; the stars and their orbs are the studded pearls”(Sri Guru Granth Sahib). “The fragrance of sandalwood in the air is the temple incense, and the wind is the fan; all the plants of the world are the altar flowers in offering to their creator” (Guru Granth Sahib). It is proper to say that in Sikhism, nature has been given the highest place, and while doing any activity, human beings are supposed to have proper regard for the elements of the environment and maintain the equilibrium.

2.3. Sikhism on Flora and Fauna

According to Sikhism, every living organism is equal in the eyes of the creator. Flora represents plant life, and fauna represents animal life in a geographical area. In Gurbani, various verses recognize that flora and fauna are as significant as human beings. Sikh scriptures give sanctity to different flora organisms. The Bani of Saint Kabir expressly states to follow vegetarianism, so we should respect the animal kingdom. The Constitution of India in the Directive Principles of State Policy, also directs the same. “The State shall endeavor to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle” (Constitution of India, art. 48). Furthermore, article 51A (g) places a fundamental duty on the citizens of India “to protect and improve the natural environment and have compassion for all living creatures” (Constitution of India, art. 51A(g)).

The specific mention of various trees in *Gurbani* signifies the importance of the plantation of trees and flowers. The wisdom of Sikh Gurus emphasized trees for balancing the ecological system on the earth. At Sikh shrines, various trees can be seen with historical events related to them. "There are three historical Beris(jujube trees) at Golden Temple, Amritsar; one among them, Dukh Bhanjani Beri, on the bank of the holy sarovar on the Langar hall side, has been here since the fourth Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Ram Das, founded Amritsar city and the holy sarovar in the 16th Century, and is over 400 years old" ("Dukh Bhanjani Beri"). At Sultanpur Lodhi, there is Gurdwara Ber Sahib; at this place, Guru Nanak planted a Beri tree ("Gurdwara Ber Sahib"). And Gurdwara Amb(mango) Sahib, which is historically connected with the seventh Sikh guru Shri Guru Har Rai Ji, is situated at Mohali ("Gurdwara Shri Amb Sahib"). Another is Gurdwara Reetha(Sapindus Mukorosa) Sahib in Uttarakhand ("Gurdwara Reetha Sahib"). Various other trees have sanctity in Sikhism, including Tahli(Shisham), Bohr(Ficus bengalensis), Pipli(Ficus religiosa), Jand(Prosopis spicigera), and Harian Velan(generally known as green vines). Even though Sikhism does not believe in animal worship but talks about respecting every creature of the earth. Sikhs believe God dwells in all humans, animals, and even microorganisms.

"*Jal thal jīṁ ā purīṁ ā loṁ ā ākārā ākār*" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang. 466).

This means there is life above the water and also below the water. Guru Granth Sahib recognizes life on land and in water. (Guru Granth Sahib).

"*Jaṁ o sabh mēh ek khudāṁ e kahaṁ haṁ o taṁ o kiṁ o murgī mārai*" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang. 466).

This means: there is God in everyone; then why do you kill chickens? (Sri Guru Granth Sahib). In this way, the *Bani* of Saint Kabir talks about a vegetarian diet. However, there is one exception in Sikh history: Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the 10th Guru of Sikhs, and his warrior Sikhs consumed meat in the jungle during wars when they had nothing to eat. In shrines, there is a tradition of serving simple food in Langar (community kitchen); Sikhism has great respect for animals and their existence.

"*Jīṁ a badhahu so dharam kar thāpahu adhram kahhu kaṁ bhāṁ ī*" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang. 1103).

The Guru Granth Sahib says: Human, you are killing other living beings and call it righteous action; if this is right in your senses, then what will be the extent of the unrighteous actions? (Guru Granth Sahib). It highlights the significance of other living creatures in Sikhism. Humans and nonhumans are equal so far as their right to live is concerned. They are equally important to maintain the balance in the environment.

2.4. Guru Har Rai Ji's Sensitive Approach Toward the Environment

The 7th Guru, Guru Har Rai Ji, had a key role in creating Kiratpur Sahib, a town of parks and gardens, on the banks of a branch of the Sutlej River in Punjab during the 17th century (Rahi). "He planted flowers and fruit-bearing trees all over the area, as well as medicinal herbs and wildlife sanctuaries for the benefit of the masses, making him perhaps the earliest environmentalist in the Indian subcontinent. Guru Ji cured Dara Shikoh(the elder son of Mughal King Shah Jahan) with the help of his herbs" (Aulakh). Sikh history claims that this made the town a healthy place to dwell by bringing animals and birds. When Guru Har Rai was a small child, he unintentionally struck a flower in his garden with his Chola (gown), which started the tale of his passion for the natural world. This event greatly wounded him, and he never picked a flower or leaf throughout his life. Instead, he developed a strong passion for and commitment to protecting the natural world (Sharma). "He began a medicinal herb garden known as Naulakha Baagh" ("Sikhs Reviving Historical Naulakha Bagh"). Now Sikhs are trying to revive this historical garden. The above incident shows Guru Har Rai was really sensitive towards the environment, but today we are far away from such a love for nature. Humans should work as guardians of these plants and flowers, not as masters.

2.5. Being Gurmukh

As a general assumption, human beings are considered selfish; we compete with each other for resources. With our selfish nature and greed, we are destroying everything on the earth. In Sikhism, there is the concept of being *Gurmukh*. This word is found in various compositions of the Guru Granth Sahib. *Gurmukh* means "Coming from the persona of the Guru" or "To be in the character or personality of the Guru" and implies being god-centered (Singh). In simple words, this means following the principles of the Guru, which are being selfless and living life without greed. But nowadays humans turn into '*Manmukh*', means who have gone away from the principles and life teachings of Gurus, just following their greedy minds and exploiting the resources that are available for every living organism on this earth. The desires of the human mind have made him corrupt; that's why he is destroying nature, and natural beings like wildlife are in danger due to human activities- poaching, deforestation for urbanization, and agricultural use. So now it's time to turn

again to simple living by being 'Gurmukh' and stop being self-centred (*manmukh*) because this earth is not a servant of human beings; this is for everyone.

3. Sacred Ecology in Islam

As is clear from the introductory part of this paper, the environment is the buzzword in the contemporary era. But the challenge of environmental protection is not something novel. If one turns the pages of history, one will come to know that there was a debate on environmental protection even thousands of years ago. In this section, we will try to trace environmentalism in Islam. The Quran, which is the primary source of Islamic law, contains various verses dealing with the significance of the environment.

3.1. Purpose of Creation of the Universe

Before discussing the Islamic point of view on the environment, we need to understand the whole purpose of the creation of this universe. We need to inquire into the basic question: Is this universe a random creation without any purpose to serve, or is it otherwise? Allah answers this question in the Quran, "*We created not the sky and the earth and all that is between them in play.*" (Quran 2:115). The greed and lust of human beings for development have turned them against nature. The nature of the universe is just, not unjust. If we analyze verses of the Quran, we can easily understand that this universe is created by Allah. It has a purpose to serve, and man is not outside or an exception to this system. The environment that surrounds us signifies the omnipotence and omnipresence of Allah (Quran 2:115). Hence, mankind has a responsibility to preserve this planet. The sacredness of the phenomenon of nature can be understood by having a look at the Quran, where Allah takes an oath by many natural phenomena happening all around us. Allah says there are signs in the earth, sun, and night and days for those who think about this magnificent creation. Allah says, "*Lo! In the difference of the day and night and all that Allah created in the heavens and the earth are signs, verily for folk who ward off evil*" (Quran 10:6). The Quran has a unique distinction in the sense that it invites the whole of mankind to think /meditate on the different signs and happenings in the environment, provided they are willing to know (Quran 51:20-21). But nowadays, the lifestyle of human beings has changed to such an extent that they never even notice the changes happening in the environment. Many more verses in the Quran talk about the environment, either directly or indirectly.

3.2. Man as a Khalifa

The responsibilities of mankind are beautifully discussed in the Quran by the word *Khalifa*, which means viceroy, representative, or steward. Allah used the word to address human beings.

"*Lo! I am about to place a viceroy on earth*" (Quran 2:30). Tafheem ul Quran explains the term *khalifa* as one who exercises the delegated powers bestowed upon him according to the will of the giver, not his own wishes. mankind works as a deputy. Mankind, being *khalifa*, is not the owner; consequently, not authorized to work according to his own sweet will. But all his deeds are aimed at fulfilling the wish of the owner. If he thinks of himself as an owner and exercises the delegated power according to his wish, or accepts another person as a real owner and works according to his aspirations and obeys his commands, then all these are acts of betrayal and rebellion (Quran 35:39). Man has to set limitations on his actions and determine the boundaries within which he should exploit the resources of the environment. He should not transgress the boundaries that will result in disturbing the equilibrium of nature. One of the major responsibilities of being a *khalifa* is to realize that man is not the owner but the trustee of this earth, and he has to maintain and promote balance in the environment. If a man neglects to fulfil his responsibility and tries to become the master of nature, then nature will destroy mankind. If a man tends to be greedy and morally corrupt, life on this planet will be threatened. The Quran has been very vocal in guiding the relationship between man and the environment. The Quran has beautifully said: *He, it is Who hath made the earth subservient unto you, so walk in the paths thereof and eat of His providence* (Quran 67:15). This earth is not subservient by itself, and the food which you eat does not grow on its own. But Allah created it by his wisdom and power so that your life is possible here. And this great sphere on which you walk with satisfaction is such a blessing that it contains every resource for you, so that you can live here (Maududi).

The phrase “Allah made the earth subservient to you” does not mean that man is free to do anything. He has to understand that every creature of Allah has a purpose; they are all in constant praise and glorification of Allah. Man is *Ashraful makhluqat*, and Allah has bestowed upon him many qualities that other creatures do not have. Allah has chosen man as his khalifa, so man has to be more responsible while interacting with the environment and components of the environment. He cannot think of destroying any creature of Allah. Instead, he has to ensure their safety. Mankind should never forget that he is answerable before Allah for every act he does. Man has no right to disturb the balance created by Allah (Quran 95:4). Allah does not want us to be arrogant or corrupt. Allah says to walk with modesty on earth (Quran 25:63). Naturally, the way of walking depicts the inner character of the man. The Quran expects us to be moderate and reasonable while walking. This interaction between man and environment is of great sensitivity, and utmost maturity is demanded from man. Man is duty-bound to ensure that coming generations receive the environment in the same form and state in which we inherited it from our ancestors. The Brundtland Report has defined “sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs” (Our Common Future). While delving deep into the philosophy of intergenerational equity, it can be categorized into two types. One is intergenerational equity, which means the right of future generations to enjoy a reasonable level of shared inheritance, and the other is “intergenerational equity”, which means the right of all people within the current generation to fair access and entitlement to the earth’s natural resources (Liyanage). This principle has been endorsed by Principle 3 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992. It provided that the right to development must be fulfilled to equitably meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations (UNCED). During the era of survival of the fittest, it was nature that provided everything to mankind. The resources in the environment are subservient to mankind. Man is the best of all creations and has the wisdom to exploit the resources for his own good. *“It is He who produceth Gardens, with trellises and without, and dates, and tilth with the production of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, Similar (in kind) and different (in variety): Eat of their fruit in their season, but render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered.” But waste not by excess: for God Loveth, not the wasters* (Quran 6:141). Allah dislikes those who waste resources (Quran 17:26-27).

It is the natural duty of a vice-regent to be judicious while using the resources of the environment. This command of Allah is also reflected in many international instruments. The Stockholm Conference particularly talked about the judicious use of resources and sustainable development. We cannot think of sustainable development if we do not exploit the resources, keeping in view the future generation. The UN conference was held in Stockholm in 1972, having considered the need for a common outlook and common principles to inspire and guide the people of the world in the preservation of the human environment. We should exploit the resources only to meet our demands. Principle 21 of the Stockholm Declaration provides that “states have, under the Charter of the United Nations and the Principles of International Law, the sovereign right to exploit their resources according to their environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction” (Stockholm Declaration). There should not be excessive use of resources, as it will be a waste of precious resources and hence unjust.

3.3. Acquisitive Nature of Man

It is a tale of the past that mankind lived under the fear of diseases like cholera, smallpox, etc. With the advancement in medical science and technology, we have brought these diseases under control and increased life expectancy. Even if industrial and technical developments have improved food items, raised living standards, resolved time and space issues, and managed various health-related issues, they have negatively impacted the environment and upset the natural equilibrium (Shastri). In today’s world, we are facing a challenge that is the result of our own handiwork. It is in this form of environmental pollution that environmental health problems are innumerable. These are caused by the emission of greenhouse gases and the unjust/uncontrolled use of chemicals and industrial waste. These chemicals contaminate water and rivers and turn them fishless. It is now clear that the unscientific and uncontrolled use of chemicals is a disaster for mankind. When a man turns selfish, morally and spiritually corrupt, he tends to transgress the boundaries set by nature, which results in disturbing the balance of the environment. Time is witness to the fact that when man tries to interfere with nature, then devastation is inevitable. The Quran has warned that mankind will face the wrath of nature because he disturbed the balance of everything that makes it. Allah says;

“So we seized each of them [the various wrongdoers mentioned in the preceding verses] for their sin: among them were those upon whom We unleashed a hurricane, and among them were those who were seized by the Cry, and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. But it was not God who wronged them, but rather, it was they who wronged themselves” (Quran 29:40).

Unfortunately, man is not repenting despite the signs of destruction being clear as broad daylight. Tsunamis, frequent earthquakes, wildfires, rapid melting of glaciers, etc., are the order of the day. The massive bushfire in Austria should serve as an eye-opener to the whole world. The reason for the devastating fire was record-breaking temperatures and months of severe drought, which have fueled a series of massive bushfires across Australia (“Australia Fires”). Rising sea levels due to the melting of ice have resulted in the submerging of coastal areas. The shrinking of the Sundarbans is not deterring the people from being ruthless exploiters. It is proper to mention the anecdote from a BBC News item published in 2019: “Thousands of people still live on the Indian island of Ghoramora, which has shrunk in size to just 4.5 sq km. It’s one of the sources of low-lying islands in the Sundarbans Delta that are rapidly disappearing. Scientists say global warming has caused melting snow and ice to swell the rivers, and the sea level has risen. Tens of thousands have fled from Ghoramora in recent decades” (“Sinking Island in the Sundarbans Delta”). It is most proper to refer to Surah Al-Rum here, which says that every destruction we are facing is the result of our own deeds.

Corruption has appeared on earth and at sea because of what the hands of men have brought; so that God may make them taste the consequences of their actions; so that they might return (that is: so that they might return to God (Quran 30:41). The Quran is reminding us and warning us again and again how the earlier civilizations were destroyed by wind, fire, lightning, stones, etc., because they turned out to be unjust and greedy (Quran 51:32).

These verses aim to warn us about the wrath of nature if we don’t shun this opportunistic and greedy attitude. Out of greediness and negligence, the government deliberately allow the industries to produce poisons and biologically potent chemicals without knowing the hideous impact on the environment. The greedy nature of mankind is evident from the order of the Supreme Court to close the tanneries in Tamil Nadu, where it was held that though the leather industry is of vital importance to the country as it generates foreign exchange and provides employment avenues, it has no right to destroy the ecology, degrade the environment and pose a health hazard. It cannot be permitted to expand or even to continue with the present production unless it tackles by itself the problem of pollution created by the said industry (*Vellore Citizens’ Welfare Forum v. Union of India*). Another significant piece of evidence of the corrupt nature of man can be the *Taj Trapezium case (M.C. Mehta v. Union of India)*. Ensuring the common good of mankind and ensuring environmental justice is still an anathema to the modern materialistic world. This is evident from the attitude of world leaders towards fixing the liability for environmental degradation. There is a strong sentiment among many of the developing countries that the issue was “a rich man’s problem (requiring a) rich man’s solution,” and that on account of the greediness of developed countries, they were being asked to curtail their modernization (Barratt-Brown). Ironically, modern man is well aware of the effects of negative and life-threatening effects of chemical corruption. Still, he continues and produces more and more chemicals to increase agricultural production. The reduction in the acreage of farmland is one of the main causes that tempt a farmer to use more and more chemicals to produce more from a limited amount of land for cultivation. It is high time to stop this greedy attitude and resort to an alternative that is more rational and sustainable.

4. Conclusion

In this context, after discussing the issue, what should we do to counter the irresponsible actions of mankind? Our response should be scientific and rational; we should change our attitude and respond in a much more mature manner. It has been mentioned in the Quran that: *“Truly God will not change the condition of a people until they change the condition of their own souls.”* This verse is enough for us to teach a lesson, provided we are ready to learn. It is a commonplace phenomenon everywhere that no one comes to rescue us unless we wish to save ourselves and ask others for help. If we do not rescue ourselves by stopping the ruthless exploitation of the environment, even Allah will not save us from the devastation that is on our doorstep. The only way out is to understand the true purpose of our creation and act responsibly. Every creature has its role to play; e.g., the earthworm performs its duty of nitrogen fixation and contributes to maintaining the equilibrium in the universe. Allah has created equilibrium in this universe, and the man who is the viceroy

of Allah has an obligation to preserve this equilibrium. The Quran says everyone should behave according to their *fitrat* (nature). If we do anything unnatural, it will lead us to destruction. Religion has a greater role in developing the compatibility between nature and man. Guru Nanak Ji, the founder of Sikhism, was himself a farmer and preached to his followers to love nature. Guru Har Rai Ji established the town of Parks and Gardens, which is known as Kiratpur Sahib. Many sikh Gurdwaras are established in the names of plants that were of historical importance. Sikhism encourages people to live in harmony with plants and animals. It is evident from all the sources that environmental protection has been the concern of mankind at every point in time. Earlier, man used to live in proximity to nature. Although in the contemporary world, man has realized the fact that industrialization has devastated the environment and framed laws both at the international and domestic levels to combat environmental degradation, there is very poor compliance. The need of the hour is to give contemporary environmental law a religious touch. There is enough material in different religions, particularly Sikhism and Islam, to contribute to the content of environmental law. It will encourage people to comply with environmental law, hence restoring the environment to its earlier position.

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