

Natural Resources and Human Welfare

(An analytical study in the light of *Sīrah*)

Muhammad Arshad Zia (PhD)¹

Director Islamic Society Oslo Norway

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Abstract: The development of human, physical, and natural capital is closely related to human welfare. Skills and knowledge are included in human capital, whereas physical capital refers to items developed by humans, such as machinery. Natural capital, which consists of the Earth's resources in their unaltered state, is possibly the most essential, nonetheless. These resources include the sun, the atmosphere, the land, the water, the minerals, the flora, and the wildlife. Natural resources and environmental capital have a crucial role in promoting human welfare and fostering national development, according to a wide range of socioeconomic specialists. Natural resources have historically ensured cultures' safety and existence, acting as a metaphorical spinal cord. Since the appropriate management of natural resources is essential to economic growth, tourism, industrial raw materials, and many other factors, this position has become even more important in the modern period. Given our dependency on these resources, mismanagement of them poses a serious threat to human life. Islam is more than just values and rituals. It categorically forbids incorrect conduct and unfavorable behavior toward the components of a positive environment. A Muslim cares the Prophetic view to flourish natural resources in the sense of use and build the homes and towns for the life. This article intends to draw the lines for human development and welfare in the usage of natural resources in the light of *Sīrah*. This study also explores the crucial connection between natural resources and human welfare, placing special emphasis on the Islamic ethical precepts.

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¹. Corresponding author Email: arshadzia313@gmail.com

Introduction

Human welfare relies on the accumulation of three key forms of capital: human, physical, and natural. Human capital, (KH) means personal skills and abilities like education, training, health etc. Human capital plays an indispensable role in advanced production processes and fuels research and development efforts that drive technical innovation. Human capital concept shows that all workers are not equal. Worker quality can be increased by investing at them through education, experience etc. This investment has main role to improve economy. The undeniable contribution to the progress of nations like America, Europe, and all developed countries can be attributed to their educated and skilled workforce.

Physical Capital (KP) comprises machinery, equipment, factory structures, tools, and various investment assets utilized in the production process. The significance of physical capital lies in its capacity to enhance the efficiency of producing goods and services, thereby fostering economic expansion. Its impact extends beyond mere quantity; it plays a pivotal role in upholding the overall quality of products and services. In the immediate term, physical capital has the ability to boost both the quantity and the superior quality of output, thus elevating its intrinsic worth.

Natural Capital (KN) encompasses natural resources present in nature without any human intervention. It encompasses a wide array of valuable attributes, including gravitational and magnetic properties, electrical forces, commercial and industrial utility,

aesthetic appeal, scientific significance, and cultural importance, among others. When considering the Earth specifically, it comprises elements such as water, sunlight, the atmosphere, land, vegetation and animals.¹

Natural resources have two major kinds; unchangeable and changeable. Unchangeable or nonrenewable resources take millions of years for changing but changeable or renewable resources take short time in this regard. Changeable resources consist at air, water, animals, plants, power and energy.²

Importance

Socio-economic experts widely recognize the fundamental and paramount significance of natural capital and environmental resources in the context of human well-being and national development. Natural resources can be likened to the backbone of a society, historically playing a prominent role in its protection and survival. In the contemporary era, this role has garnered even greater importance due to its underpinning of essential factors like economic growth, tourism, and the supply of raw materials for industries. A prominent Indian ecologist A. R. Agwān aptly asserts that nature forms a complex web of interrelations, where all natural elements are intricately connected and reliant on one another. The

¹- Edward B.B, **Natural Resources and Economic Development**, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

²- Roger Perman, Yue Ma, **Natural Resources and Environmental Economics**, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 506.

survival of each entity is intricately intertwined with the well-being of others.³

From the very beginning, Allah, the Almighty, bestowed these resources upon humanity without any cost, as stated in the Holy Quran: "Allah is He Who made the heavens and the earth and rained from the sky and brought fruits by this one as food for you and He made the ships for you so that move them in the sea with His order and He made the rivers for you and made sun and moon moveable for you and made the night and day".⁴

A non-Muslim scientist, Denton, asserts, "The Universe has been deliberately created to facilitate the existence of humanity."⁵ In The New Encyclopedia Britannica, it is stated that the essential requirements for sustaining human life, including food, water, air, and a source of warmth, have been accessible to humans for millennia. The significance of natural resources is underscored by the fact that all living creatures, including humans, are dependent on them for survival.⁶ Renowned scholar Abdul Hameed elaborates on the importance of natural resources by highlighting that as social and living beings, humans possess biological and ecological necessities such as light, air, water, sustenance, shelter, and community. In order to secure these fundamental requisites,

³- Abdul Mannan Cheema, **Natural Resources and their uses in the context of Islam and Science**, (Islamabad: Asian Research Index,2023), 20; A R Agwan, **Islam and Environment**, (N. Dehli: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), 2.

⁴- Al Qur'ān, 14: 32-34.

⁵- Cheema, **Natural Resources and their uses in the context of Islam and Science**, 50.

⁶- Ibid, 21.

humans, like all other living creatures on Earth, may harness the resources of the planet.⁷

Global Initiatives to conserve Natural Resources:

In both the realms of science and the English language, the concept of "Conservation" is employed to signify the safeguarding of natural resources. Conservation is the careful maintenance of natural resources and their protection from destruction.

As articulated by an American forester, "Conservation entails the judicious utilization of the Earth and its resources for the enduring benefit of humanity."⁸

International Organizations for Conservation of Natural Resources:

There are many organizations in the world that are working for the conservation of natural resources. Some of them are as:

International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources	IUCN
UN Development Program	UNDP
World Wild Fund	WWF
Global Forest Watch	GFW
World Conservation Union	WCU
Green Peace	GP
International Referral System	IRS

⁷- Ibid, 50.

⁸- Ibid, 61.

International Days for Conservation of Natural Resources:

Every year, whole world observes a few days to highlight the importance of natural resources. Here the names of days and dates are like:

Water Day	22 March
Earth Day	22 April
Forest Day	21 March
Environment Day	05 June
Wild Life Day	03 March
Animals Day	04 Oct
Energy Day	22 Oct
Oceans Day	08 June

These organizations and special days reflect man's interest in nature as well as its importance.

Islam: A Faith in Harmony with Nature

Islam is a religion of nature. Almighty Allah has urged individuals to explore nature in order to realize the Holy One and put it to good use for all of humanity. He stated: "Turn your face toward the religion being upright, the nature of Allah in which He has created human being. There is no changing in God's creation. This is the valuable religion but mostly people don't know".⁹ This is what the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) said: Every born is born at

⁹ Al-Qur'ān, 30: 30.

nature but his parents convert him in Judaism and Christianity and the Magian.¹⁰

Islam is a whole code of conduct, not merely a set of rites and ideals. As it offers advice on how to relate to Almighty Allah, it also exhorts a grateful attitude toward His creation. Almighty Allah detests misbehavior and poor attitudes toward all things that contribute to a positive and healthy social environment. In the Holy Quran, he stated: "When Satan gains control, he works to ruin the earth and destroy its crops and progeny and God hates corruption".¹¹

On earth, Almighty Allah appointed man as His caliph. He mentioned: "I am appointing man My assistant in the world".¹² Among contemporary Muslim scholars, it is frequently held that, in accordance with Islamic principles, a man who does not work to tap the resources of the earth and the universe is a disobedient servant of Allah and does not work for the purpose for which he has been created. This is how a Muslim scholar describes the duties of the caliph. If any man misuses and destroys the nature and its resources he will be questioned and punished. Almighty Allah declared: "Then that day, you will be asked about all the pleasures".¹³

Holy Prophet's Commandments about the conservation of Natural Resources:

¹⁰- Al Bukhari, Muhammad bin Ismail, Imam, Sahih Al Bukhari, (Riyad: Bait A Afkar Al Daulia, 1998) Chap: Children of Non-Muslims, No. 1385.

¹¹- Al-Qur'ān, 2: 205.

¹²- Al-Qur'ān, 2: 30.

¹³- Al Quran, 102: 08.

The Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) commanded His adherents to appreciate nature and have a constructive approach toward natural resources.

1- Proper use of water and its prevention from pollution

Water is a crucial natural resource with enormous potential for human utility. Only 3% water is fresh on Earth, with a startling 97% of the planet's water being salty. According to the Holy Qur'ān, Water is the base of every living thing. God said: "And We made every living thing from water".¹⁴

Water has an effective role on human civilization. Egyptians, Indus Valley, Roman and all other civilizations have flourished near water.

Pakistan has serious water crisis. Almost in every summer, Pakistan faces flood emergency because of monsoon season and growing summer heat waves. Thousands of people and livestock go into crisis. Mostly water is wasted due to lack of adequate management. UN counts Pakistan in those countries which facing critical water situation as usable water is decreasing every year. WHO reports that only 15% Pakistani drinks clean water.

Holy Prophet (peace be on him) declared it a virtue to give water and ordered many companions to dig water wells. On the other hand, water wasting was forbidden by the Holy Prophet to His people. One day Holy Prophet (peace be on him) passed by

¹⁴ Al-Qur'ān, 21: 30.

Hazrat Saad while he was performing ablution and said: “Why you are wasting the water? He said: is in ablution wasting the water? Prophet said: Yes, although in the side of river”.¹⁵ In another Hadīth, it is narrated that a person came to Him and asked about ablution. He (peace be on him) taught him the method of ablution. He washed every part three times and said: This is complete Wudhū and whoever does more than this, has done evil, transgressed the limits and wronged himself.¹⁶ He (peace be on him) disliked water pollution. He said: “Don’t urinate in standing water that does not flow and then wash in it.”¹⁷

2- Protection of ground minerals

The earth is the only planet capable of supporting human life among the millions of worlds that Almighty Allah has created. He said: “He produced you from the earth and settled you therein”.¹⁸ For the benefit of humans, Almighty Allah created thousands of minerals inside the earth. Only the fact that the globe consumes around 100 million barrels of petroleum each day may give us an idea of their significance. After all, safeguarding the earth also involves preserving the minerals, and maintaining the minerals in turn secures human life. Positive utilization of the environment is

¹⁵⁻ Al Qazvinī, Abu Abdullah Muhammad b. Yazid, *al-Sunan*, (Riyad: Maktaba al maarif, 1996), Chap. *Mā jā fī al-qasd fī al-wudhu*, No. 425.

¹⁶⁻ Ibid, No. 422.

¹⁷⁻ Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhari, *al-Jami‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Chap. *Al-Boul fī a maa aldaim*, No. 239.

¹⁸⁻ Al-Qur’ān, 11: 61.

required for human welfare. Holy Prophet (peace be on him) said: "If anyone brings barren land into cultivation it belongs to him".¹⁹

3- Air Purity

Water and air are equally essential for human life as a basic natural resource. Almighty Allah said: "And blowing wind and clouds between the sky and earth are symbols for those who understand".²⁰

Having access to clean air is one of our basic human rights. However, in today's globe, industrial development has caused air pollution by contaminating the atmosphere. Not just people are impacted by this problem; all living things are as well. Earth temperature ultimately increases by air pollution. According to ERJ report, by air pollution 6.7 million people killed in 2019.

Along with other difficulties, Pakistan is facing air pollution. This problem increases in winter especially. Annually, 128000 people die by air pollution. Karachi and Lahore are major but much polluted cities of Pakistan. In 2021, Pakistan was accounted third most polluted country in the world.

It is noteworthy that the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) underlined the need of refraining from actions that cause air pollution. In this context, He prohibited to cut trees. He recommended: "If anyone cuts the lote-tree (uselessly, unjustly)

¹⁹- Abu Daood Sulaiman b. Ash'ath Al Sajastanī, *Al-Sunan*, (Riyad: Bait ul Afkar Al Daulia, 2020) chap. *Fī ikhyā i Alamwat*, No. 3073.

²⁰- Al-Qur'ān, 2: 164.

Allah brings him headlong into hell.²¹ Holy Prophet (peace be on him) forbade the use of things that cause air pollution. He said: "Whoever has eaten garlic or onion should keep away from us and our mosque".²²

When first caliph of Holy Prophet, Hazrat Abu Baker Siddique sent his army to Syria, he advised his commander: "Don't kill a female, child and an old man. Don't cut a fruitful tree, and don't destroy population. Don't slaughter sheep and camels except for food. Don't burn bees and don't steal from the booty and don't become less courageous".²³ This advice emphasizes how important it is to protect pure air.

4- Plantation

Plants are gifts of God that add to the unparalleled beauty of this planet. They are primary sources of medicines. They provide fruits, vegetables, water, oxygen, shade and wood. They are an important source of protection against flood, soil erosion and environmental pollution.

Almighty Allah discussed many plants in the Holy Qur'an like date palm, fig, olive, grapes, banana, pomegranate, garlic, onion etc. He said: "And we placed therein gardens of palm trees and grapevines and issued the springs in it".²⁴ Syeda Aisha said that Holy Prophet said: "The house there is not date palm tree, those

²¹- Al Sajastani, *Al-Sunan*, No. 5239.

²²- **Al-Bukhari**, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, No. 5452.

²³- Al Asbahi, Malik b. Anas, **Mawttā Imām Malik**, (Beirut: Dar Ikhya al Turas, 1997), *Kitāb al Jihād*, No. 881.

²⁴- Al-Qur'an, 36: 34.

who live there are hungry.²⁵ He also said: "If a Muslim plant a tree or cultivates crops and a bird, person or animal eats from it this is a charity for him".²⁶

5- Kindness with Animals

Animals are very important natural resources. They are very helpful in making human life easier as they carry load and used for riding. A man gets food, clothes and many useable things from them. Almighty Allah said: "Allah created cattle for you so that you may ride and eat them".²⁷

Hazrat Jabir Bin Abdullah said that he asked to Holy Prophet: "Have you ever shepherded sheep? He said: "yes and there has been no Prophet but has shepherded them".²⁸ He ordered to His followers to be kind to the animals. A person said to the Prophet: O Messenger of Allah! I fill my tank with water for my camels. If someone else's camel comes and drinks water from it, will I get a reward for it? Then the Messenger of Allah said: "There is a reward and a reward because of everyone who has a liver."²⁹

6- A balanced and spiritual approach towards natural resources

²⁵⁻ Al Sajastani, *al-Sunan*, No. 3831.

²⁶⁻ **Al-Bukhari**, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, No. 2320.

²⁷⁻ *Al-Qur'an*, 40: 79.

²⁸⁻ **Al-Bukhari**, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, No. 5453.

²⁹⁻ Al Shebani, Ahmad b. Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, (Bairut: Muassa tu al-Risala, 1995), , chap. Hadith of Hazrat Suraqa, No. 16922.

Today, main causes of climate change and earth pollution are materialistic approach, capitalistic mind set and endless desires. The man tries to get more and more wealth and does not care positive or negative approach. Then he chooses wrong life style and wastes his resources.

Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) taught a good and positive attitude towards nature and its resources. The meaning of respect to nature is using its resources with balance. Holy Prophet (peace be on him) forbid unwise use of natural resources and ordered to use things with moderation and balance. He said: "He who behaved moderately did not become poor".³⁰ On the other hand, He emphasized spirituality and admired controlled desires against materialistic approach, capitalistic mind set and endless desires.

7- Economic growth and Expertise in work

Raw material is very important in production process. The country has as much raw material as it become economically powerful. It increases GDP of any country, but this is the age of specialization. Knowledge capital, technology, expertise in work and skills are the most important determinant of a country's economic growth. The main reasons for the high GDP of developed countries are technology and working skills. On the other hand, many countries with natural resources lag behind in development due to lack of technology and labor skills.

³⁰ Ibid, No. 4048.

Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) narrated importance of expertise in work. A person asked: "Which is the best manumission of slaves? Holy Prophet Peace be upon Him told: "Which is the most expensive and beloved to his master". He asked: "If he can't do? He told: "Help the weak person or do well for those who can't do anything".³¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) demonstrate a deep reverence for the natural world and its priceless resources. These teachings place a strong emphasis on the moral obligation and fundamental component of good stewardship and responsible use of natural resources.

It is obvious that protecting the environment and managing resources sustainably are not only advice but rather a deeply entrenched duty for every person, including Muslims. We set out on a path to sustainable development that not only helps the individual but also offers blessings and prosperity to society as a whole by adhering to these teachings and taking practical steps to maintain our natural world.

As we make an effort to safeguard these values, we not only pay reverence to the Holy Prophet's (peace be on him) legacy but also advance the welfare of the world and future generations. Because doing so brings about harmony between our faith, the environment, and our common wealth, it is consequently our

³¹- Al-Bukharī, *al-Jami' al-Sahīh*, No. 2518.

communal responsibility to preserve and protect the Earth's resources.

Recommendations

Islam is a religion of nature. A good and constructive attitude toward nature and its resources is something that the Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) teaches. Respecting nature means utilizing its resources responsibly. Unwise use of natural resources is forbidden by the Holy Prophet (peace be on him). He opposes excess and commands that things be used in moderation and harmony. He declared: "He who behaved moderately did not become poor".³² In order to preserve natural resources and make them more valuable, we should adopt a balanced mindset. He emphasizes cleanliness and purity. He declares cleanliness half of Islam and said: "Cleanliness is the half of Islam".³³ With keeping cleanliness and eating pure and halal things, we must make our life and society pure and clean.

Here are some suggestions and recommendations which include Sustainable policies, interfaith dialogue, community empowerment, and integrating Islamic ethics to ensure responsible natural resource use for human welfare.

³²- Al Shebani, *Al-Musnad*, chap. Hadīth of Hazrat Abdula b. Masood, No. 4048.

³³- Al-Qushirī Muslim b. Hajjaj, *al-Jami' al-Sahīh*, (Riyaz: Bayt al Afkar al daulia, 1998) , chap. *Fadhā al Wudhu*, No. 223.

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