

SIGNIFICANCE OF FORESTS IN ISLAM

By

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1. PREAMBLE

1.1 Human beings have been familiar with the plants existing in the natural environment since the pre-civilization era. They have been utilizing the services of trees as a source of food, shade, sports gear and weaponry. The inextricable relationship between the man and trees has since grown manifold. Their respective perpetuation is mutually interdependent. Yet the man has exhibited cruelty to the silent trees by embarking on damaging practices for meeting the selfish ends of the so called development.

1.2 Islam is the moderate divine religion. It believes in the golden principle of live and let live. Man is the best creation of Almighty Allah. The Nature has appointed him as His caliph on the Planet Earth. Human beings have been empowered to make use of the natural resources for fulfilling their needs of course, not at cost of extinction of the biodiversity. Man is required to maintain congenial environment for survival of wide range of biodiversity. Whenever and wherever the humanity had deviated from showing soft corner for the plants and animals it had to face His severe wrath. Human history is replete with such examples.

2. ISLAMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF FORESTS

2.1 Trees in Divine Books

2.1.1 The trees have been discussed in detail in the Divine Books. Likewise these have been mentioned on many occasions in The Holy Quran and golden sayings of The Holy Prophet (PBUH). Islam has given the examples of good and bad trees. Good Muslims will be rewarded by free access to fruit and other trees in the life hereafter. On the contrary the sinners will be forced to eat cactus like plants to control their hunger.

2.1.2 Almighty Allah has explained certain guiding principles with the help of trees so that common people may easily comprehend the situation. Significance of trees is evident from the swearing by a tree by Almighty Allah when He lays stress on a matter for teaching the humanity. In this connection He has sworn by the date and olive trees. That is why preservation of forests has been given prime status in the Islamic teachings. A few verses from The Holy Quran are quoted below:

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

1. Editor, The Environ Monitor and Environment Consultant, W 715, DHA, Lahore Cantt.

And We said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers."

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ
ءَامَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُ إِلَى
عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٣٦﴾

And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day." [Allah] said. "And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination."

أَيُّودٌ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ تَكُونَ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ لَهُ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَأَصَابَهُ الْكِبَرُ وَلَهُ
ذُرِّيَةٌ ضَعْفَاءٌ فَأَصَابَهَا إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ نَارٌ فَاحْتَرَقَتْ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ
اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٣٧﴾

Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines underneath which rivers flow in which he has from every fruit? But he is afflicted with old age and has weak offspring, and it is hit by a whirlwind containing fire and is burned. Thus does Allah make clear to you [His] verses that you might give thought.

وَهُرِّجِي إِلَيْكَ بِجِدْعِ النَّخْلَةِ نُسُقِطْ
عَلَيْكَ رُطْبًا جَزِيًّا ﴿١٣٨﴾

اور کھجور کے تنے کو اپنی طرف بلا، تجھ پر تازہ پکی کھجوریں
جھڑ پڑیں گی

وَآيَةٌ لَهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيْتَةُ ۖ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا

وَآخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿١٣٩﴾
وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا جَبَّتٍ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ
وَفَجَّرْنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْعُيُونِ ﴿١٤٠﴾
لِيَأْكُلُوا مِنْ ثَمَرِهِ ۚ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ
أَيْدِيهِمْ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٤١﴾

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا
مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
وَمِمَّا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

اور ایک نشان ان کے لیے مردہ زمین ہے ہم نے اسے زندہ کیا

اور اس میں سے اناج نکالا تو وہ اس سے کھاتے ہیں۔
اور ہم نے اس میں کھجوروں اور انگوروں کے بلوغ پیدا کیے
اور اس میں چشمے جاری کیے۔
تاکہ وہ اس کے پھل سے کھائیں اور ان کے ہاتھوں نے
اسے نہیں بنایا، تو کیا وہ شکر نہیں کرتے
بے عیب (ذات) ہے جس نے سب جوڑے پیدا کیے اس
سے جو زمین اگاتی ہے اور ان کی اپنی جانوں سے اور
اس سے جو وہ نہیں جانتے

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ
نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

وہ جس نے تمہارے لیے سبز درخت سے آگ بنائی،
تو دیکھو تم اس سے جلاتے ہو

وَالنَّجْمِ وَالشَّجَرِ يَسْجُدَانِ ﴿٥٢﴾ اور بڑیاں اور درخت سجدے کرتے ہیں

فِيهِمَا مِنْ كُلِّ فَأْكِهَةٍ تَرَوْجِنَ ﴿٥٣﴾
ان دونوں میں ہر پھل کی دو قسمیں ہیں۔

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ أَيْهَا الضَّالُّونَ الْمَكْرِبُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾
 لَا تَكُونُوا مِنْ شَجَرٍ مِّنْ زَقُومٍ ﴿٥٧﴾
 فَمَا لَكُم مِّنْهَا الْبَطُولَ ﴿٥٨﴾
 پھر تم اے گمراہو! حبٹلانے والو!
 ضرور تھوہر کے درخت سے کھاؤ گے۔
 پھر اپنے پیٹوں کو اس سے بھرو گے۔

ان دونوں میں پھل ہے اور کھجور اور انار
 فِيهِمَا فَالِكِهْنُ نُزُلٌ وَرَمَّانٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

مَا قَطَعْتُمْ مِّنْ لِّينَةٍ أَوْ تَرَكْتُمُوهَا
 قَائِمَةً عَلَىٰ أُصُولِهَا فَبِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
 وَرِجْزِ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

تم نے جو کھجور کا درخت کاٹا، یا اُسے اپنی جڑوں پر کھڑا
 چھوڑا۔ سو اللہ (تعالیٰ) کے اذن سے تمہارا اور تاکہ
 وہ نافرمانوں کو رسوا کرے

2.1.3 Manifestation in Islamic Art and Culture

Apart from other benefits the trees form essential component of Islamic art and culture. Painters have portrayed the trees in their artistic works depicting hundreds of soothing impacts including aesthetics. Biodiversity has often been included in the state-of-the-art poetry.

2.1.4 Benefits of Trees Means of Livelihood

- In the world 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihood.

- **Environmental Preservation**

The trees themselves or assist others for the sake of environmental preservation. These selfless creatures bear the vagaries of severe climate and weather but provide congenial environment for human beings and other biodiversity. Some of the environmental performances are discussed in the following:

- These are the main source of shade and cover against scorching heat and extreme cold. Even forests protect the birds in their nests from rains and the human beings and animals sitting underneath. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has categorically prohibited the human beings from urination under the trees.
- These moderate the local weather conditions. These absorb the heat from the environment and render insulation against high temperatures. Transpiration from trees also contributes in the same direction.
- Dust generated from vehicles, soil excavation and other resources is adsorbed on the surface of leaves. Later the leaves are washed by rains and winds.
- The trees absorb the undesirable noise by improving local acoustics.
- The plants render their significant share towards maintaining soil environment which is characterised by intense biological, chemical, physical, physiological and textural activities. Through the varying root system these absorb the chemical compounds thus reducing the soil salinity and soil moisture for decreasing waterlogging. Soil microorganisms flourish in the roots thereby fixing and releasing nutrients.

- **Climatic Moderation**

In treeless environment climate is harsher than in the area having vegetation. There are more rains in the forested belt.

- **Protection of Wildlife**

Wildlife flourishes well in the undisturbed and quiet areas with enough vegetation. The plants render privacy for breeding, resting and nesting. Forests support all types of biodiversity in their sustainable survival.

- **Prevention of Floods**

Trees provide strong checks / breaks against the fast flowing floods. They may lay their own life for protection of human beings and their properties.

- **Share towards Watershed Management**
Life of reservoirs depend on inflow rate of sediments and siltation. For this purpose the catchment area needs efficiently managed by structural and non-structural means. Plantation of trees and control of overgrazing are important non-structural steps.
- **Food Sources**
Plants are only producers in the food chain. Forests are sources of variety of foods for human beings and grazing and feeding for livestock and wildlife. Natural and wild foods had been handy things at disposal of early human beings. Many plant, animal and viral species survive on the trees. Honey is mostly obtained from the beehives on trees.
- **Recreation Spots**
Forests are excellent spots for recreational visits and picnics. People go to forests during holidays for relaxing in natural environment. The Holy Quran has mentioned the trip of Hazrat Yousuf and his brothers to the forest.
- **Medicinal Trees**
Medicinal plants like quinine, neem and zeera are found in the forests. Mangroves have variety of such plants. Pakistan has the sixth largest mangroves in the world.
- **Aesthetics**
Plants are the jewellery of earth. These add to the scenic beauty of land. In presence of shady and flowery plants, the area becomes attractive. In addition to aesthetics the forest spots produce favourable smells and musical effects.

2.2 Islamic Injunctions for Preservation of Natural Forests

2.2.1 Almighty Allah has created the plants and trees in accordance with certain divine design. Also everything in universe has been placed at the disposal of man. He has often been advised to ponder over the natural phenomena and accordingly contribute towards welfare of humanity and other biodiversity.

2.2.2 Till the dawn of 19th Century about half of the Earth was covered with naturally growing trees. Trees serve the man and other animals through countless ways. Therefore as basic rule the humanity has been strictly forbidden to destroy the forests without any compelling and legitimate circumstances.

3. BIODIVERSITY AT GLOBAL LEVEL

3.1 Species

According to United Nations Environmental Programme 13 to 14 billion species have been estimated to exist on Mother Earth. 1.75 billion species have been recorded and 2/3rd are the animals. Currently 5,400 species of animals and 4,000 species of plants are vertebrates.

3.2 Wildlife

Number of wildlife has reduced to 30 million. 20,000 lives meet extinction every year.

3.3 Forest cover

At the present 1.7 billion hectares (ha) area is covered with forests. It should be remembered that the forests are the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the world.

4. BIODIVERSITY IN PAKISTAN

Present Status of Biodiversity

4.1 Pakistan is blessed with following species:

- Mammals - 178
- Fish - 198 freshwater 788 marine
- Birds - 660 (50% resident and 50% migratory)
- Reptiles - 210
- Amphibians - 24
- Invertebrates - 20,000
- Plants - 5700

(Source: WWF Pakistan)

4.2 Species under Threat

The threatened species of wildlife are given below:

- Indus River Dolphin,
- Balochistan bear,
- Leopard Cat, Lynx,
- Snow leopard, Nilgai,
- Straight-horned Markhor,
- Marcopolo's sheep,
- Ladakh Urial,
- White-headed Duck
- Houbara Bustard
- Cheer Pheasant
- Green turtle
- Indian python
- Black Buck
- Asiatic wild ass

(Source: WWF Pakistan)

4.3 Forest Cover

4.5 million ha area is covered with forests. About 4.5% area has forests as against required figure of 25%. This is an alarming situation. Forest cover needs to be increased as an immediate step.

5. TYPES OF FORESTS

There is wide range of forests in the world. These are classified on the basis of terrain, elevation at which these are found, pattern of utilization, property rights, local traditions etc. Islam considers the forests as a natural resource of country whose bounties should be available to all and sundry. Important types are enumerated below:

5.1 Natural and Artificial

5.2 State and Private

5.3 Protected and Productive

5.4 Reserved

5.5 Irrigated and Riverine

5.6 Community

5.7 Tropical Rain

5.8 Mangrove

5.9 Farm Forests including Marginal Plantation

5.10 Courtyard and Social

6. DEFORESTATION SCENARIO

6.1 Present Deforestation Rate

• **Global**

2.5 million ha of forests are being cut per year. Forests in tropical region are being destroyed @ 0.7% per annum.

• **National**

Trees are being cut @ 7,000 – 9,000 ha per year. It is about 0.2-0.5% of the total forest area. It is the second highest rate in the world.

6.2 Causes of Deforestation

Main causes of deforestation are highlighted in the following:

• **Policy/ Planning Failures**

In case of developing countries the forests are not maintained in sustainable manner. Comprehensive policy/planning is not made to cater for afforestation in case of tree losses due to natural or anthropogenic activities.

- **Increasing Requirement of Wood / Timber**

Requirement of wood/timber is increasing on account of exponential growth of population. It is needed for fuel, structures, buildings and furniture purposes.

- **Lack of Energy Sources**

Consumption of energy is rising on account of growing domestic need, improving social status and increasing industrialization. In case of non availability of hydro, thermal, nuclear and other energy sources the masses resort to using biomass indiscriminately.

- **Lack of Livelihood Means**

In absence of other means of livelihood masses are forced to cut trees and earn livelihood. This is true in case of mangroves and sanober forests in Pakistan.

6.3 Impacts of Deforestation

Denudation of earth from the tree cover causes huge setbacks to the humanity and other lives occupying the Mother Earth. A few damages are explained in the following:

6.3.1 Disappearance of Civilizations

Many civilizations had disappeared from the global scene because of loss of biodiversity. The nations which could not preserve their natural capital had been severely punished in shapes of floods, droughts, climatic upheavals, food shortage, water crisis and disease occurrences. In the modern history African countries like Ethiopia and Sudan have suffered severely. Ruthless cutting of trees for establishment of housing colonies and industrial units is intolerable by any standards.

6.3.2 Addition of Carbon into Environment

Burning / clearing add 7 – 30 % of total carbon emission internationally.

6.3.3 Loss of Soil Fertility

In absence of vegetative cover the upper soil layers are exposed to chemical, physical and biological breakdowns. The weathered soft soils are prone to be drifted away. Top soil contains required plant nutrients. If top soil is washed away it will result in loss of fertile soil. In turn crop produce will be affected.

6.3.4 Increase Soil Erosion

If the trees and undergrowth are cut the soil is exposed to wind and water erosion. Water erosion impacts the soil on slopes especially in hilly areas. 76% area of Pakistan is arid and semi-arid and is exposed to varying degrees of erosion.

6.3.5 Reduced Carbon Sinks and Climate Change

Terrestrial and aquatic plants consume 50% each of the total carbon dioxide gas generated in the world. Damage to trees will lead to reduced carbon storage. This is the major greenhouse gas which brings climate change. Presently our universe is facing varying climate changes resulting in climatic upheavals, floods, droughts, cyclones, rise of sea level and increased global temperatures.

6.3.6 Loss of Biodiversity

Cutting of trees result in moving away of birds, reptiles and other wildlife to other nearby favourable place. Otherwise they may be threatened and face extinction.

7. CONCLUSION

Islam is the complete code of life. Biodiversity is of immense significance in the Islamic teachings. The Creator has appointed man as His vicegerent on the Earth for looking after the plants and animals. Man has been advised to preserve the trees even during adverse environment of war.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Awareness about biodiversity (especially the plants) should be widely given to the masses through formal and informal means of education with ultimate aim of creating cleaner and greener environment.

8.2 Islamic principles concerning vegetation should form basis of motivation for successful implementation of ***grow more trees campaigns***.

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