

Ecological Traits in Prophetic Traditions (*A ḥādīth*)

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ABSTRACT

Islam is one of the monotheistic faith among the Semantic faiths, where the central kernel is TawĪĒd, i.e. Oneness of Allah, and unique with His features. The purpose of the creation of mankind in the Quranic perspective is “Worshipping Allah” in letter and spirit. For the fulfillment of this very purpose Allah made the Earth (Environment) in service (Musakhar) for mankind. For upholding this very purpose, Allah revealed His verdict (the Quran) upon an unlettered man namely Muhammad, among the people. Muhammad was assigned the task of clarifying and explaining the Quran. This Prophetic exegesis of Quran was termed as Hadith by the early generations of Islam. Prophet taught as he was commanded to do so. During all this process of preaching and teaching, Prophet sometimes instructed to his Companions about the physical world and its wellbeing. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss the Prophetic cordiality with the physical world i.e., Environment. In the Prophetic behavior we have a corpse of traditions, dealing with distinctive aspects of Human life. Prophetic example can be used as the noble tool for environmental or ecological awareness. The fraction of his traditions, which deals with the conservation of resources and the Prophetic approach towards environment will be the main focus in the paper.

Keywords: *Awareness, Conservation, Environment, Humanity, Islam, Prophet,*

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam is not merely the name of a ‘belief system and a few rituals’. Of course not. Primary Scriptures of Islam, both Quran and Sunnah not only deal with intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of Human Life, they govern each and every nook of human life which supports or purports man’s existence. Talking about Prophetic Traditions (which entertains the position of ‘exegesis and explanations of the Quran), have crystallized and shaped up Muslim Societies. Prophetic Traditions forms the basic set-up of Muslim Faith, epitome of social justice and at the same time acts as the second and foundational source of Islamic Legislation. These traditions occupy the significant role in the formation and development of Muslim Culture and Civilization. These are not only of the theological importance, they shape up and propound much more than theology. These traditions on the one hand emphasize the personal and societal advancements and at the same time shapes up environs as well. Prophetic Traditions engulf the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of Human Life and at the same time propounds much more. The most motherly paradigm without which man’s existence is impossible is none, but the “Environment”. Islamic ideals not only emphasize the preservation and conservation of various ingredients of environment or the motherland earth but also claims God as its Sustainer¹ and to Whom it belongs². Again it is important to

¹ Al-Quran, 01:01

² Al-Quran, 2:115

mention here that the 'Ultimate purpose of creation of the mankind and *Jinn*' is worshipping Allah³. In this process of worship, Allah has made his creation in service (*Musakhar*) of man⁴ and has been advised to take care of it. This fact has been entertained by Allah in this verse of the Quran. 'And We did not create the heaven and the earth and that between them aimlessly. That is the assumption of those who disbelieve.'⁵

The religion of Islam attaches the greatest importance to the conservation of the environment as a whole. For the environment and all the living beings within it are created by God. As human beings, we have been entrusted with conserving and developing it. The conservation of the environment is therefore not only a human obligation but also a religious obligation. Indeed, believers should undertake this responsibility more than anyone. It is understandable if someone who does not believe in God and the Last Day of Judgement is unconcerned with it, but for a believer to be unconcerned is both incomprehensible and unforgivable.

II.BODY

Aisha (ra) is reported to have said, 'Prophetic character was the Quran'⁶. Whatever, Prophet Muhammad did or said is the practical version of Quran. Prophet being the living Quran, preached the Divine message and shaped up the various aspects of Muslim society. The prophetic ethics commonly known as prophetic traditions or *A'ladEth*, is a wide corpse of literature and doctrines which talk about various aspects of Human life. It talks about man's interaction with physical world and meta-physical world. Here, falls the 'Environment' as the pivotal paradigm of physical world.

Nowadays, with the growing awareness of the hazards facing our Earth and the alarming involvement of manmade threats has not only threatened the environment but man's existence as well. The Prophetic interaction with the environment can be fruitful and pertinent. The most distinguishing feature of Prophetic experience with the environment is relation which the prophet established between the environment and hereafter. When it is linked to hereafter, then it matters for Muslims. The prophetic ethics in relation to environment, is a sanctified relation which Muslims entertain with religious fervor. For Muslims it is not a novel phenomenon, of course not. The prophet of Islam was so eco-friendly that 15 centuries ago, he advised his Companions to be just with the environment while utilizing its various components. So as far as Muslims are concerned, Environmental consciousness is as old as the genesis of Islam.

There are a good number of Prophetic traditions which emphasize prophetic behaviour and his eco-friendly attitude towards the preservation and conservation of various components of environment. Here are a few examples;

1. Anas is reported that the Prophet said, "If the Hour (the day of Resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it."⁷

³ Al-Quran, 51:56

⁴ Al-Quran, 14:32

⁵ Al-Quran, 38:27

⁶ Sahih al-Muslim, Hadith No. 746

⁷ Musnad Ahmad, Hadith No. 12491.

2. Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet said, "A man felt very thirsty while he was on the way, there he came across a well. He went down the well, quenched his thirst and came out. Meanwhile he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst. He said to himself, "This dog is suffering from thirst as I did." So, he went down the well again, filled his shoe with water, held it with his mouth and watered the dog. Allah appreciated him for that deed and forgave him." The Companions said, "O Allah's Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?" He replied: "There is a reward for serving any living being."⁸
3. Anas is reported that the Prophet said, "If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him."⁹
4. The Prophet said, "Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment." The listeners asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what is a just cause?" He replied, "That he will kill it to eat, not simply to chop off its head and then throw it away."¹⁰
5. Abu Barza reported: I said, "O Prophet of Allah, teach me something that will benefit me." The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Remove harmful things from the roads of the Muslims."¹¹
6. A woman was tormented because of a cat which she had confined until it died and she had to get into Hell. She did not allow it either to eat or drink as it was confined, nor did she free it so that it might eat the vermin of the earth¹²
7. Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Al-`Aas, reported that the Prophet passed one day by Sa`d ibn Abi Waqas (May Allah be pleased with him) while he was performing *wudu*' (ritual cleaning of body parts in preparation for prayer). The prophet asked Sa`d, "Why is this wastage?" Sa`d replied "Is there wastage in *wudu* also?" The Prophet said, "Yes, even if you are at a flowing river."¹³
8. Abu Hurairah reported, Prophet said, "One of the rights of a she camel is that it should be milked at a place of water."¹⁴

Shaikh Sayid Sabiq mentioned in his magnum opus 'Fiqh al-Sunna' that Sa`d ibn Abi Waqas, rode to a place in *Aqiq* and found a servant demolishing trees, upon which they took away his things. Later when the servant's people came to ask for them, he denied to do so on the ground that it is Prophetic order to take them. (Reported

⁸ Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith No. 6009.

⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith No. 2320

¹⁰ Sunan al-Nasa'i Hadith No. 4445

¹¹ Sahih al-Muslim, Hadith No. 2618.

¹² Sahih al-Muslim, Hadith No. 2242.

¹³ Musnad Ahmad, (Sahih) Ahmad Shakir.

¹⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 2378.

by Muslim and Abu Dawud). Al-Ha'kim said (it authentic) and added that the Prophet also said: Whoever cuts anything from it should be deprived of enjoying it.¹⁵

Another tradition of the prophet is reported as;

The Most Merciful One is merciful towards those who are merciful. Act kindly to those on the earth so that those in the heavens will be merciful to you.¹⁶

The earth is acknowledged by Islam to be a place of refinement and adoration of Allah. Prophet is reported to have said, "The earth was made a place of worship and purification¹⁷." The meaning of this is that when water is not available before worship, earth may be used for canonical ablutions (*tayammum*) in its place. Prophet was emphasising this point when he said, "Allah is beautiful and He loves the beautiful; He is generous and loves generosity; He is clean and loves cleanliness."

How, beautiful is another tradition, where Prophet taught his Companions, be good mannered, disciplined, be good to your people and your Environment.

He said, "Beware of the three acts that cause you to be cursed: relieving yourselves in shaded places (that people utilize), in a walkway or in a watering place."

All these traditions signify how friendly Prophet was with the various components of environment. How he advised his Companions to take good care of various components of environment and at the same time he warns his Companions don't be unkind with the creations of Allah. It is not only important for being eco-friendly. It is not only about 'Planting of plants, caring the animals, keeping the environment clean, not wasting natural resources, but it is also linked with one's destiny in the hereafter.

Another aspect of these traditions is maintaining hygiene and cleanliness. It is so significant and central in the Islamic living that without proper Cleanliness (*Taharah*), Prayers are valueless and not acceptable in the way of Allah. In the Quranic text Allah clearly addressed to his servants, eat and take but don't transgress.¹⁸

In the Prophetic character people are categorically taught to live in harmony with nature and use judiciously its various elements, to protect fauna and flora, and to worship the Creator by being merciful to the creation. What is also unique in Prophet's advice is to maintain balance between nature and man. It is also significant that the connection between ethical practices and the eternal effects in the life after death, which represents a greater inspiration for Muslims to care for the earth and its resources. Furthermore, Prophet approved protection of natural assets and at the same time endorsed the ample legislation for the conservation of these resources within specified parameters. Here it is worth to mention, that Islam is forerunner in presenting such progressive measures as environment protection.

¹⁵ Jamil, Muhammad Assayed. *A Study on Environmental Issues with Reference to the Quran and the Sunna*, (Tr. By Lehcen Haddad.) Publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Egypt, 1999, Pp. 74.

¹⁶ Jamia'h al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No.1924.

¹⁷ Ibn-Majah, Hadith No. 567

¹⁸ Al-Quran, 7:31

It is significant to be justified with the Prophetic Ethical philosophy of the Environment. His all-inclusive and realistic assessment of nature and his understanding of man's place within the natural world established environmental consciousness within the Muslim community. The pragmatic results were seen soon after the demise of Prophet. When the four rightly guided caliphs established separate grazing lands for incapable animals. And during the times of War caliphs intensely directed to their subordinates don't cut down trees and don't wipe out cultivating lands and don't misuse other natural resources. After the companions of Prophet the legacy was transmitted with the same zeal and zest to the later generations of the Muslim communities. The forthcoming caliphates after the Prophet (SAAS) inherited the prophetic legacy with same valor and vigor. The Umayyads, Abbasids, and Uthmaniah Caliphs all gave special treatment to the ecological world or environment. There is historicity of the facts that Muslim Empires set examples of ecological balance. It is not astonishing that all this is the result of Prophetic unbound impetus on ecological balance. Some known facts witnessed by European travelers not in the earliest times of Islamic history but late in the 16th or 17th century confessed these facts while visiting the Muslim lands.

The famous French writer Montaigne said,

“The Muslim Turks found hospitals and pious foundations for animals even.”¹⁹

The French lawyer Guer, who travelled in the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century, talks about a hospital in Damascus where sick cats and dogs were treated.²⁰

A few highlights from Prof. M. Sibai's details:

In the old tradition of pious foundations, areas were allotted for the grazing and treatment of sick animals. The 'Green Mar'a' (the area now covered by Damascus sports stadium) was a place that at one time had been made over to the grazing of helpless animals, which were no longer fed by their owners since they had lost the power to work. Such animals grazed here till their deaths. Among the pious foundations of Damascus there were also places where cats could eat and sleep and wander about. There were hundreds of cats here which, having no difficulties in finding their daily food, were like the permanent fixtures of the place.

Birds have always had a special place in Muslims' lives. They have felt particular affection not only for songbirds like nightingale, but for others such as chiefly the pigeon, and storks, doves, and swallows. This affection has been manifested in various ways: the defence of birds' rights, establishing pious foundations for the feeding of birds, founding hospitals to tend to sick birds, the taming of some species and keeping them in cages, as well as the opposite of this, setting them free from captivity. Just as many people have released them from their cages out of love for them, so many others have kept them in cages.

¹⁹ [http://www.nur.org/en/intro/nurlibrary/An Islamic Approach to the Environment 132](http://www.nur.org/en/intro/nurlibrary/An%20Islamic%20Approach%20to%20the%20Environment%20132) (accessed on 31-December, 2017. 10:38 Pm)

²⁰ *ibid*

The famous French poet Lamartine recorded the following observations:

Muslims have good relations with all creatures, animate and inanimate: trees, birds, dogs, in short, they respect all the things God has created. They extend their compassion and kindness to all the species of wretched animals which in our countries are abandoned or ill-treated. In all the streets at specific intervals they leave bowls of water for the dogs of the district. Some Muslims found pious foundations at their deaths for the pigeons they have fed throughout their lives, thus ensuring that grain will be scattered for [the birds] after they have departed.

How profound are Yunus Emre's, the Turkish poet of 13th century, words;

“We love creatures for the sake of their Creator”!²¹

III.CONCLUSION

A quick glimpse of analyzing the Prophetic Ethical Code, reveals that his approach was holistic and diverse. He was a reliable propounder of environmental philosophy. He was a pioneer in the field of maintenance, justifiable development and resource management, and constantly directed to maintain harmonious balance between man and nature. Thus, Prophetic interaction with the Environment is universal in nature, it undertakes a central bond between all natural elements and bases its teachings and ideals on the premise that if man abuses or depletes one constituent, the environment as a whole will suffer direct consequences. It is unfortunate that the harmony and balance advocated by Prophet of Islam is almost lost and forgotten. The times when Earth is under severe environmental cries, from soil pollution to Ozone depletion, global warming to violent storms, pollution to scarcity of basic resources like water, soil so on and so forth. It is ultimate time for world communities to have a keen look towards Prophetic interaction with the Nature, and to get lessons for the betterment of future generations.

²¹ ibid