

Environmental Care from the Perspective of Religions

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Abstract—Religion is a belief held by human beings to shape the way of life-based on the rules that have been set. All religions have respect towards their environment and provide guidance on environmental issues. It is the responsibility of human beings to preserve nature for the sustainability of life, not for human beings only but for all other living beings also. The act of human beings that use excessive natural resources that leads to neglecting its sustainability, is deserved to be punished. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the basic approaches of religion on the environment also, its relationship with human beings and nature. The study found that there are clarifications from all religions on how important is for human beings to take good care of the environment and description of the punishment for any act of damage. This study is also a survey library that uses the content analysis method.

Keywords—human beings, management, moral ethics, nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nature is everything that existed around us encompassing all the things in the heavens and earth even though it cannot be seen by the naked eyes. The fact that there is an increasingly alarming global environmental crisis faced by human beings now is not something to be underestimated. In addition, many devastating disasters reported by the news, unfortunately, had claimed lives and properties. The reports starting from deforestation, water, and air pollution had successfully created fear among the community who is questioning their fate in the future. Nonetheless, this arising issue has become a hot topic of discussion and debate globally and is no longer focused on the specific individuals or associations but, on all parties involved. Various studies have been conducted to seek the answers to why the issues of environmental destruction occur and then several concepts and suggestions have been voiced to ensure the sustainability of the environment. Besides, it is vital to realize that environmental crises also need to be viewed from the point of moral and ethical because failure in doing so can be a sign of human beings are running away from the main reason for the major destruction that is, happening to this universe. The main reason is, that it needs to be acknowledged that the problem begins from the human being's heart itself [1]. Still, some are willing to do heinous things despite being

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aware of the significance of nature while all major religions in the world share the principle of encouraging good deeds, rejecting terrible acts, and offering peace for the good of all. Religion also emphasizes the importance of managing the environment properly and wisely to maintain the balance of nature given by the Creature. The main religions including Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism explicitly forbid any mismanagement of the environment and it illustrates how strong the relationship between religion and nature is. These religions defined that one of the core responsibilities of human beings is to act as guardians of the earth and its contents [2]. Thus, every social member must respect other life and morality to maintain the whole ecosystem. This paper describes the basic approaches and principles of religion on the environment in the relationship between religion, human beings, and nature.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Accordingly, for more than 50 years, the direct awareness of this environmental crisis had existed especially in the publication of the book titled *Silent Spring* in 1962 by Rachel Carson. She is also a scientist who has managed to raise awareness of the world community related to the worsening environmental crisis. Nowadays, the result of unethical human actions, environmental destruction has become a big concern in this world. Even though multiple strategies have been initiated to tackle the environmental issues, new problems have arisen because the causes of environmental degradation are still unresolved. Over the years, the studies related to nature indicated that much pressure has been highlighted on the development of science and technology in addressing these challenges consequently, it seems like the roles of culture and religious heritage in environmental protection have been preoccupied [3]. Reference [4] mentioned there are conferences and interdisciplinary seminars on environmental issues that have blamed certain religions for what is happening in nature nowadays. Reference [5] also highlighted that Malaysian students are not very 'friendly' towards the environment. It is somewhat an unfortunate event since religion has laid down special rules so that human beings can be friendly with nature. The prejudice whereby religion is the one that influences human being with a bad attitude toward nature need to be corrected and educated with the proper understanding.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey library that uses the content analysis method without participating in any field research. Several

books from the writings of past scholars are used as sources of reference, especially the holy book of the Quran and Hadith. Some of the translation words have been re-checked by an expert in that field. All obtained information was selected following the main focus of this paper.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Islam

The dictionary of Idris al-Marbawi [6] defined nature by the meaning of "ما سوى الله", which means 'anything other than Allah SWT'. So, it can be understood that nature, defined by Islam is all creatures created by Allah SWT, either visible or otherwise. Besides, Imam al-Ghazali stated in his book *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, that the universe is classified into two, namely nature which can be observed by man or by physical, and the supernatural (*ghaib*) realm which is cannot be discovered by the senses. It indicates nature or realm is for all beings, and each of them has its function and role. The term sharing is rightfully giving a definite meaning that the attitude of tolerance, cooperation, and respect towards each other is strongly emphasized in the context of togetherness.

Moreover, Islam is not just a belief and a form of worship solely but, Islam is also a system of life and has a comprehensive rule of life [7]. Environmental protection is a crucial aspect of Islam and it can be proved by the verses of the Quran that calls on human beings to take good care of the environment. Then, the efforts in the wise management and conservation of the environment are considered noble as every deed is done because Allah SWT alone surely would be rewarded by Him. As civilized Muslims, they must maintain their image in line with the religious teaching because for a believer who is truly obedient to the religious teaching, the responsibility of preserving nature is considered a difficult task and cannot be neglected no matter what. Even so, through Quran and Hadith, Islam has called on many recommendations on the environmental care, for instance, Allah SWT has commanded in surah al-A'raf, verse 56, which says [8],

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَأَدْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ
مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٥٦)

"Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): for the Mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good" (translated by Yusuf Ali).

Muslims acknowledged that everything in the heavens and the earth was created and belongs to the eternal God of the universal, Allah SWT. The universe does not exist by itself nor does the universe shaped from any pattern or by coincidence but, it has been created under an organized and purposeful plan by Him. Human beings do not have the right to exploit natural resources arbitrarily and irresponsibly because everything belongs to Allah SWT. Every creation of Allah SWT is as crucial as human as stated in Quran, surah al-Hajj verse 64, which says [9],

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ (٦٤)

"To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: for

verily Allah- He is free of all wants, Worthy of all Praise" (translated by Yusuf Ali).

Verily, Quran and Hadith are complete guidance in ensuring sustainable development, natural resources conservation, and protection of wildlife in Islamic countries over the world. Allah SWT peculiarly forbids any act of bringing damage and being the cause of environmental destruction. Consequently, if human beings do any act that is forbidden by Allah SWT to the point of destroying the creatures that have been created well, is considered an act of showing discourtesy or barbarism towards the original owner. As stated in Quran, surah al-A'raf verse 85, which says [10],

...وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ۚ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ (٨٥)

"...and do not mischief on the earth after it has been set in order, that will be better for you, if you are believers" (translated by Muhsin Khan).

In addition, human beings have a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of nature based on the concept of man as caliph that tells man's responsibility for this universe. Caliph comes from the word *khalafa* (خلف) means to follow or come after him or the most accurate term is 'successor'. Human beings have been appointed as a caliph entrusted with the duty to look after nature's harmony and then would be questioned about their responsibility whether they have done good or otherwise in the field of *Mahsyar* (hereafter). Besides, reference [11] stressed the significant role of the human being as caliph in making prosperous in the earth and how Islamic morals are the ones that will guide human beings concerning the environment. Allah SWT has stated that human beings who done any act of damage will meet His wrath as in surah al-Ma'idah verse 64, which says [12],

...وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (٦٤)

"...and they strive throughout the land [causing] corruption, and Allah does not like corrupters" (translated by Sahih International).

Islam calls on the importance of trees in protecting nature as well as reducing the effects of climate change over thousand years ago. Furthermore, Allah SWT has placed plants in line with His other creations so that it can be claimed that plants are equally significant in their function and role. Reference [13] pointed out plants are 'friends' of human beings and animals since they used the oxygen released by plants to breathe on this earth to continue living. The fact proved by reference [14] as they stated that plants are created to provide benefits for all beings, especially human beings. It is also a blessing from Allah SWT based on the fact that different plants sprout from the same soil and at the same time can be considered as a great manifestation of His Mercy to mankind. In the meantime, the Prophet Muhammad SAW has emphasized planting trees because it can also give benefits to the planters as the Prophet said in a hadith which says,

" مَا مِنْ مُّسْلِمٍ يَغْرِسُ غَرْسًا إِلَّا كَانَ مَا أَكَلَ مِنْهُ لَهُ صَدَقَةٌ، وَمَا سُرِقَ مِنْهُ لَهُ صَدَقَةٌ، وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبْعُ مِنْهُ فَهُوَ لَهُ صَدَقَةٌ، وَمَا أَكَلَتِ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ فَهُوَ لَهُ صَدَقَةٌ، وَلَا يَزُرُّهُ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا كَانَ لَهُ صَدَقَةٌ "

'Never does a Muslim plant a tree except that he has the

reward of charity for him, for what is eaten out of that is charity; what is stolen out of that, what the beasts eat out of that, what the birds eat out of that is charity for him. (In short) none incurs a loss to him but it becomes a charity on his part' (Sahih Muslim, no.1552).

In the same way, when environmental care is associated with religion ultimately, building morality in an individual whereby religion and morality can be contemplated as one [15]. More than that, reference [16] addressed the view of morality that, it is not limited to the adjustment of the relationship between human and other human beings alone but, also controls human relations with all things surrounding them and more deeply regulates their relationship with God. There are several elements from a moral perspective, which are:

1. The Nature of *Qanaah* (contented with what is there)

Islam nurtures the nature of *qanaah* so as not to become greedy to the point of destroying nature.

2. The Nature of *Mahabbah* (love)

Islam encourages its believer to embrace the nature of *mahabbah* towards nature for the reason with that love, it can grow repentance as a caliph of Allah SWT.

3. The Nature of *Ihsan* (supervised action)

Ihsan is described as an act of obeying Allah SWT as if we see Him despite knowing that He sees us but we do not see Him. Eventually, it is not about praying only but, with the nature of *ihsan* or kindness, it makes us to think for a moment before doing any act of damage and destruction on the creations of Allah SWT.

4. The Nature of *Taawun* (helping each other)

Islam is a religion that calls on the practice of helping fellow mankind in order to ensure that the environment stay clean and is taken care of wisely.

B. Hinduism

Hinduism is centered on the fact that God is the Creator of the universe. There are three foundations of divinity namely God the Creator (Brahma), God the Guardian (Vishnu) and God the Destroyer (Shiva). Despite that, there is only one God with absolute power which is Brahman [17]. Besides, Hinduism sees the world around them as 'thou' which means they depend on each other. Most Hindus are aware of the environment as the natural world which is everything around them is part of earth and nature. Hinduism is also a religion that is rooted in nature, for instance, the texts; *Vedas*, *Upanishad*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Epik*, have many references related to nature such as rivers, mountains, trees, animals and earth. Hindus must fulfill the moral rule which is *Dharma* and *Dharma* is to maintain cleanliness so, they are prohibited from doing any act that pollutes the environment but needs to be responsible to preserve it [18]. *Dharma* is also functioned in controlling human behavior that tends to act independently.

Moreover, according to reference [19], Hindus have complied with the teachings of the *Veda* (knowledge). The Vedic teachings explained more details about the creations of the universe and the existence of all form beings as well as prioritized the power of the universe in every life. Vedic

culture and scripture describe a clear concept of the earth's ecosystem and its necessity to maintain its balance of it. This matter is widely discussed in the pages of Sanskrit literature. A verse from the Rig-Veda stated, "The sky is like father, the earth like a mother and the space as their son. The universe consisting of the three is like a family and any kind of damage done to any one of the three throws the universe out of balance" [20]. Another verse from Rig-Veda says, "Thousands and Hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life, then take up systematic planting of trees" [21].

Next, Hindus believed in the power of nature and its relationship to life itself, as their religion claimed that there are five main elements classified as the environment; space, air, fire, water, and earth. They also believed that without these elements, human survival is quite impossible. Reference [22] mentioned that Hindu scriptures teach its follower, that they must protect the five main elements; *Prithvi* (Earth), *Vayu* (Air), *Aakash* (Sky), *Jal* (Water), and *Agni* (Fire). Hindus hold on faith that all living beings are sacred because they are a part of God and all plants and animals have souls. Consequently, they need to show their respect for all beings, humans, animals, and even plants by the principle of *Ahimsa*. Reference [23] highlighted that the forests not only functioned for human daily needs but also, as a refuge from the heat of the sun and storms. Based on this doctrine of *Ahimsa*, Hinduism forbids the act of killing and causing injury to any beings except in the context of agreed Vedic sacrifices. Hinduism also opposes cruelty especially against animals for the benefit of mankind purely because the religion declared that animals not only have economic value but also, a significant ritualistic value in society [24].

More than that, in Hinduism too, every living being has an *atman* (soul) and at its core, Hindus must defend the environment. For this matter, nature cannot be destroyed because humans need to survive using it in a way Hinduism forbids the cutting of trees freely and even encourages preserving the forested areas. The importance of forest preservation and conservation is emphasized in the *Atharvaveda*. *Manusmriti*, known as the written record in Hindu law has defined various punishments for the offense of cutting plants and trees. For example, *Charaka Samhita* considered that the destruction of forests is an act dangerous and can threaten human beings. *Charaka* also specifically mentions air pollution as the cause of many diseases and also rejects the idea of excessive water consumption. Nevertheless, the idea of sustainable development is found in Hindu religious texts that have been written for centuries [25].

Last but not least, Hindus also believed that every individual would be received a reward (karma) as a result of his/her behavior towards the environment, that is, if a good deed is done to the environment then a good reward would be earned and vice-versa. Hence, Hinduism always reminds its followers to live in harmony and peace with nature. Karma is also closely related to the concept of rebirth or *Samsara*. These

concepts illustrate how Hindu religious teachings pointed out the relationship between human beings and nature.

C. Christianity

Christianity is one of the main religions that demanded its follower to live their daily life based on the Holy Bible, which begins with Genesis which tells the story of God's creation of the universe. In the context of Genesis 1 is the details of steps in creation like how God created nature and mankind, from the heavens and earth, light and dark, day and night, water, dry land, plants and trees, stars, and all living beings or animals and human beings were created for God's pleasure. Moreover, there are many references in the Bible to environmental events, and it is necessary to take good care of them. The message contained in the Holy Bible stated that God has provided everything for mankind, consequently, they should take very good care of what has been given as a sign of gratitude.

The traditional Judeo-Christian belief in God's creation provides the basis for the Christian understanding of the relationship between nature and human beings. Reference [26] stated that the theological concepts and doctrines in Christianity are that mankind is a shadow of God whereby they need much effort to emulate how God cares for the universe. In this manner, honoring the world means honoring God wherein, as God's creation, human beings and other elements of nature, such as plants and animals must interact and live together under God's power [27]. Ultimately, in another word, they must submit themselves to God's plan and way.

Other than that, according to Christianity, God who created the universe would not allow it to be neglected carelessly because all beings are subjected to the supervision of God. On the contrary, this religion teaches its believer that God loves all of His creations [27]. Additionally, human beings must preserve natural resources and protect their environment since based on the concept of stewardship, they are the representatives of God who are responsible for managing all of God's creations on this earth [18]. The idea of "God exists in nature" is a key point of view, Earth stewardship that started in Genesis 1:28. There are three important contents in Genesis 1:28 which are; a) nature is sacred because it was created by God, b) human beings must protect the environment because it was created by God, and c) God exists in nature [28].

Then, human beings are not the absolute owners of this universe even if they are only permitted by God to use it to obtain their necessities for living. The responsibilities given by God to them indirectly enable them to prevent them from doing any damage on this earth. Human beings also need to understand the rules set by God regarding natural law so that they can perform their duty as stewards successfully. Reference [18] addressed that the understanding of these rules would allow human beings to manage this natural world properly and cautiously.

On the other hand, the church also plays an important role in spreading awareness of environmental care. Its involvement in environmental issues emerges from its belief that God had created and loves His world and from its understanding of the

implications of the stewardship concept [3]. The church also is believed to have a positive influence on stewardship belief [28].

Furthermore, the earnestness of Christians towards the environment can be proved by their involvement actively in conferences on environmental issues at the international level. Among them is, the Christian Declaration on Nature held at Assisi in 1986 which states the following:

1. All creations are as closely dependent on each other as God created them. The harmony of this creation is for the glory of God.

2. The role of human beings is to protect all beings not to abuse or destroy them.

3. Any form of exploitation of nature and its resources is rejected. Human beings cannot do any act that can damage nature including nuclear war.

D. Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in the northeastern part of India about 2500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama, also known as Lord Buddha. According to reference [29], Buddhism is about ethical and moral values that respect biodiversity also, a spiritual religion that outlines a way of life through daily practices such as meditation, mindfulness and refraining from damaging plants and animals as far as possible. According to Buddhism also, nature is alive although it seems unmoved. Reference [18] pointed out this doctrine believes that the heavens and earth are the parents of life. Human beings must care for and protect nature as much as they respect both of their parents. Buddhism also believes that nature is dynamic and everything that happens is a result of constant change. Change is a principle of nature called *sankhata dharma* which means exist, not absolute and has a pattern of emergence, disappearance and change [30]. For this reason, this religion claimed that there is no beginning to the creation of the universe. Similarly, in the concept of Buddhism, there is a relation between the occurrence of each phenomenon in this universe to the concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (Dependent Origination) whereby a phenomenon appears because of other phenomena that support its emergence, which can also be linked to the concept of ecology [31].

In Buddhist teaching, it revolves around dharma which means truth and the path of truth. It teaches human beings to be responsible for all their actions and they would go through the cycle of rebirth before reaching nirvana that is, no more rebirth after that. Reference [32] mentioned that the concept of rebirth is the reason to have concern for future generations. Someone who is seeking true happiness (*nirvana*) should care about natural resources that would be passed on to future generations. Buddhists also believed in Karma which is all their actions would bring consequences or can be referred to as 'you reap what you sow' [33]. Besides, Karma is also closely related to the concept of rebirth. The concept of Karma that is believed in Buddhism can encourage its followers to behave well to receive blessings and have a better life in the future or the next [33] [34].

In the meantime, even though Buddhism allows nature to be used for spiritual pleasure, it should be enjoyed in moderation and avoid the nature of greediness (*Dhammapada*) [35]. Buddhism even cares about wildfire as its followers would be reminded constantly about the importance of protecting for biological diversity by respecting nature and living in harmony with it. Furthermore, Buddhist orient themselves toward the environment over three interrelated religious beliefs which firstly, God and the surrounding local spirits caused them to focus on the effort of conservation of the environment in the form of 'sacred natural sites' secondly, both sin and karma associated with killing animals and plants and thirdly, moral teachings of Buddhism itself teaches its believers to avoid any violence [36].

Buddhism had developed a code of ethics and morals called the five noble precepts (Pancasila) as the basis for shaping the system of human life so that it would be a practical one. The five basics are, 1) it is forbidden to kill, 2) it is forbidden to steal, 3) it is forbidden to lie, 4) prohibited to living a life of immorality and 5) prohibited to consume intoxicating liquor. The ethic of prohibition of killing is closely related to the basic concept of Hindu teaching, called Ahimsa. This teaching calls on loving fellow beings and strictly prohibited any form of killing. In this manner, it is clear that Buddhism emphasizes not doing any act of harming any surrounding living beings instead it needed to be protected at all costs. In addition, taking someone else's property and not returning it can be considered stealing for instance, what is around us such as water, land and forests because they are the property of nature in a way a human being cannot make it their own irresponsibly. Then, speaking untruthfully and committing immorality by lust also invites bad luck to the environment. Next, the bad effects of alcohol consumption are also described in the ethical and moral values of Buddhism to the point of its intoxication can lead to the insane acts that able to cause disaster to the environment and its surrounding.

On top of that, Buddhists would worship various objects of nature as their God and Goddesses as a sign of their gratitude because they are aware of their survival entirely depends on what is accepted by nature [35]. Buddhist environmentalists also hold on to a belief that nature is very important in their lives as Buddhists are born and also die under trees. For this reason, it explained how the environment should be respected no matter what. Reference [29] then highlighted because of that, the monks are moved to the forests and mountains solely to isolate themselves for the sake of meditating on the values of Buddhist teachings.

Eventually, in the first decade of the 21st century, eco-Buddhist scholars and practitioners have brought concepts from the classical Buddhist tradition to build Buddhist environmental ethics that can prove Buddhism is a religion that always adapts to the environment. For example, protecting forests, water and agriculture from large-scale development projects and other misuses as well as initiating the projects of sustainable agriculture and land conservation. Thus, avoiding

and resolving the destruction of the environment itself is a part of Buddhism teachings.

V. CONCLUSION

Indeed, all religions universally have recognized the need for environmental care as described in the religious scriptures that urge their followers to respect nature and its biological diversity. Accordingly, if human beings obliged what has been taught by their religions regarding the prosperity of the environment, surely all beings would be secure. Unconsciously, what human beings enjoyed today is not theirs, but ultimately, they need to take good care of it for the sake of future generations. Therefore, it is a shared responsibility whereby every generation uses nature properly without destroying and abusing natural resources since they have the right to benefit from it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study is a part of the fundamental research grant scheme (FRGS/1/2020/SS0/UMT/02/10) under the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia, conducted together with other researchers from UMT and UniSZA.

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