
LAND POLLUTION AND ISLAMIC TEACHINGS

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ABSTRACT

The land is Allah's most precious blessing for mankind. He adorned it with his countless blessings and appointed man as His vicegerent. Unfortunately, it is the man who polluted it for his own interest and now man himself is suffering from its dangerous consequences. Respiratory infections, lung cancer, cholera, hepatitis, typhoid and cardiovascular problem are but only a few of the long list diseases man has been suffering for a long time. Overcrowding in cities, increase in household and industrial waste, poisonous agricultural activities, excessive use of plastic and escalation of deforestation are the concrete reasons behind the exacerbating land pollution. That is why, land pollution has been the major concern for the whole world. Islam is a complete code of life. It is not just a set of instructions, but it is a complete guide with respect to every matter of life. Islam hates pollution and suggests strict punishment for those who are involved in such malpractices. There are many injunctions of Islam regarding land pollution and its preventions. It encourages man to plant trees, make land, water and air clean, and prohibits him to go against the nature of its environment. This is the only religion which shares its half faith in cleanliness. Therefore, man's duty can never be the desolation and destruction of the earth. The responsibility of Allah's vicegerent is of course to settle the earth and not to dispose of it in a way that is contrary to the purpose of creation.

Keywords: Land Pollution, Land Pollution and Islamic Teachings, causes of land pollution, Impacts of land pollution, Remedies of land pollution, Islam and Pollution.

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Introduction:

Land pollution has become one of the major global issues for the nations. The complexity of this multifaceted menace lies in the fact that it is caused by multitude of factors ranging from natural to anthropogenic activities. Natural disasters include volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and others contaminate the environment of this planet and become the sole reason of land, water and air pollution simultaneously. However, the most important reason behind land pollution is anthropogenic activities which are directly or indirectly annihilating the land and soil. Today, many harmful chemicals have become the part of our daily lives. For example, plastics, solid waste material, industrial toxins, synthetic chemical fertilizers, mine accidents, nuclear explosions, deforestation, reckless use of pesticides in crops and many other pollutants play their key role in polluting the land. Consequently, the land is losing its productive capacity as well as many dangerous diseases are growing rapidly. It is the need of hour to counter this menace and it is the ISLAM which addresses this whole phenomenon dynamically. Islam is not merely a religion of some injunctions; it is the religion of solution to all problems. So far, the land is concerned, Islam provides complete guidance to people in this regard. It does not only forbid people polluting the land, it also tells us practical measures to make land clean and free of pollution.

Definition of Land Pollution:

Land Pollution means an undesirable change that spoil the properties and quality of land. When physical, chemical or other pollutants are released intentionally or unintentionally into the environment, they make land polluted and endanger it for all living beings. It happens mostly as a result of direct or indirect repercussions of human activities. According to Britannica Encyclopaedia, land pollution is defined as “the deposition of solid or liquid waste materials on land or underground in a manner that can contaminate the soil and groundwater, threaten public health and cause unsightly conditions and nuisances”.¹

Sometimes, it is also called as soil pollution. It is defined as: “the presence of chemical or substance out of place and / or present in higher-than-normal concentration that has adverse effects on any non-targeted organism”.²

In the light of these definitions, it is quite clear to say that contamination of soil with non-biodegradable waste and toxic chemicals is called land pollution.

Concept of Land Pollution in Islam:

Allah has made man His vicegerent and created everything as a gift for him. Like others, land is one of the best and fundamental blessings for man. Allah beautified the land with His countless blessings and gifts. He made the land green with plants, created giant oceans, longest rivers and fresh springs for life. He produced many kinds of flowers,

fruits, animals, birds and arranged light, darkness and climate in systematic order to make humans life easier and comfortable.

It is the land from which he receives water to consume, food to eat and numerous minerals which make his living comfortable; and when he dies, it provides him place to cover his body. In addition, man makes the most of its resources but at the same time, he moulds its environment unfriendly. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ³

“We established you on earth, and created in it means of living for you. Little you appreciate.”

Man disclosed the depths of oceans to harness its means for his luxury and contentment life. He explored this planet and tried his best to renovate it with the advancement of science and technology. He left all values behind in the way of development and challenged the nature of universe. Though all his actions and practices were carried out for the development but simultaneously, all his deeds proved to be poisonous and diluted for land. Islam has prohibited man to pollute it. Allah loves cleanness and purity of things. He does not allow man to blemish the land and hates to those who are involved in such activities. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says:

وَابْتَغِ فِيهَا الثَّيْلَةَ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنَ كُلًّا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ
وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفُسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ⁴

“And seek the wealth of the Ultimate Abode with what Allah has given to you, and do not neglect your share from this world, and do good as Allah did good to you. And do not seek to make mischief in the land. Surely, Allah does not like those who mischief.”

There are several places in the holy Qur'an, in which man is strictly enjoined by Allah from damaging the elements of environment. In the following verse, there is a clear message for man to refrain from hurting animals and plants.

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ⁵

“And when he turns back, he moves about in land to spread mischief in it and to decimate crops and animals. And Allah does not like mischief.”

The land has a tremendous ability of dissolving germs and harmful elements and this quality helps it to defend against various bacterial attacks. But there is a limit, and exceeding the limits, the balance of terrestrial environment begins to alarming for health. In the glorious Qur'an, this act is declared as mischief.

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Major Causes of Land Pollution:

1. Deforestation: Deforestation has become the major issue in these days. The whole world is suffering serious hazards because of this menace. Due to the growing human population, forests are rapidly disappearing from the world. According to the report of Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020, 420 million hectares of forest have been lost worldwide through deforestation since 1990.⁶ They are being brought under construction for establishing industries, residencies, commercial zones and other economic activities. The value of land has been fully lost, which results in both land degradation and pollution. Therefore, ecosystems and a variety of life are facing several challenges to survive.

2. Cremation: Cremation is the process of burning dead bodies till it is converted into ashes. This custom has been practiced by the followers other than Islam in different parts of the world. This act adversely affects the air, the land and the water at the same time. Its smelly smoke pollutes the air directly. Dumping ashes of dead body into the river makes water impure and dangerous to health. In addition, burning huge amount of woods causes deforestation and makes land vulnerable to life. Cremation is not only the source of pollution but it is indeed an act of degradation of mankind as well.

3. Excessive Use of Toxic Fertilizers and Pesticides: With the increase in population, the demand of food has much increased. Because of the increase in demand, more and more quantity of food is required to be produced. This why, in these days, the farmers are utilizing toxic fertilizers and pesticides so that in short period of time, the crops can be produced at a high rate. But they do not understand that it has long term side effects, because it leads to contamination and poisoning of soil.

4. Industrialization: As the demand for food, homes and the things of daily use have increased, more industries are established. Many industries have been developed to meet the needs of growing population. This has led to deforestation, landfills and piles of non-biodegradable waste. Paints, chemicals, plastics, and metals, among other industrial manufacturing by-products and residues have damaged the environment.

5. Overcrowded Landfills: Each family produces a certain amount of rubbish in a year. Waste such as aluminium, plastic, paper, fabric, and wood is collected and delivered to a local recycling place. Items that cannot be recycled end up in landfills, spoil the beauty of cities and pollute the land.

6. Mining Activities: This is one of the most negative factors for soil. It destroys the soil and its structure. In addition, it adds highly toxic contaminants of various heavy metals to soil. Many harmful metals such as cadmium and lead come out of mines and make the land defiled.

7. Soil Erosion: This leads to loss of fertile land. When it rains on infertile land the soil gets washed along with water. With this soil, lot of good nutrients that are essential for good



quality of crops are also washed along with water. Hence it affects the quality of crop. It leads to loss of forest cover and loss of grazing for animals.

Impacts of Land Pollution:

1. Impact on The Environment: Land pollution cripples the environment directly. There are many forms of land pollution which make environment adverse to all living things in general and humans in particular. Such as ecosystems and habitats are damaged terribly because of deforestation and other sources of land pollution. It also disrupts rain cycle and expedites the temperature of environment. As a result, soil erosion and desertification happen.

2. Impact on Health: Excessive use of toxic chemicals, pesticides and sprays for agricultural purpose have posed serious diseases to human health. Everything that becomes the source of land pollution, ultimately proves factor of spreading many dangerous diseases among humans, animals, birds and other living things. Their bodies are losing the ability to resist against bacterial and viral infections. They are at the mercy of vaccines and medicines to survive. Skin cancer, lungs diseases and digestive disorders have become the common diseases in our society.

3. Air Pollution: Non-biodegradable garbage which does not decompose in the soil, is subsequently burned on the land. This way, air gets polluted. Burning such material in open air, releases poisonous compounds into the environment and invokes harmful impact on human health.

4. Water Pollution: Land pollution also pollutes the water in different ways. Contaminated soil with sewage system and sludge, affects the surface and ground resources. Heavy metals, pesticide residues, fertilizers and other chemicals are washed into the water sources which endanger the marine life.

5. Change in Climate: Land pollution has imbalanced the ecosystems. Expanding deforestation, increasing population and immeasurable emissions of poisonous gases have exacerbated global warming inevitably. Demand of oxygen has increased but its sources are being depleted. Moreover, burning of fossil fuels has escalated emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂) which has heated the planet at an incredible rate.

6. Impact on wildlife: Wildlife animals have been hit hard in recent decades as they continue to face the threats regarding their unsecured natural habitat environment. Unceasing harmful human activities have gradually led to land degradation and pushed them to the verge of extinction. Excessive discharge of different chemicals on land has made the ecosystem undesirable for the survival of plants and animals in their interconnected food chain.

7. Loss of Fertility: Loss of fertility is another problem caused by land pollution. The soil contains some important elements and microorganisms that are essential for fertilization

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and decomposition. But according to Food and Agricultural Organization, they are being killed by using too much toxic fertilizers in fields. In addition, soil lacks natural quality which consequently affects its productive capacity. According to a Global Report on Food Crises published by United Nations, 155 million people were in acutely food insecure and in need of urgent assistance in 2020⁷. Therefore, land pollution is proved to be great threat to food deficiency in the world.

Remedial Measures Against Land Pollution:

1. Reforestation: Forests play their vital part in securing planet from undesirable change. As well as, they save life by providing sufficient food. Islam encourages man to make this land green and fertile. It emphasises people to make the barren land fertile so that it can be useful for all. In this context, many sayings of our beloved Prophet (ﷺ) can be quoted which may convince people for this purpose. One of these is mentioned here in which Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said,

مَنْ أَحْيَا أَرْضًا مَيْتَةً فَهِيَ لَهُ⁸

“If anyone brings barren land into cultivation, it belongs to him”.

This hadith inculcates the importance of plantation among the people. To make people the owner of land for the sake of its cultivation is indeed an act of propagating its importance among people. Islam does not only preach people to plant but it also prohibits people to cut them down. To cutting them is declared a big sin in Islam. And a person who involves in this practice is warned capital punishment to receive in hereafter. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said:

مَنْ قَطَعَ سِدْرَةَ صَوَّبَ اللَّهُ رَأْسَهُ فِي النَّارِ⁹

“Whosoever cuts down a Lotus tree will have his head put into the Fires of Hell by Allah”.

Now a days, planting has become an indispensable for the entire world. The planet is suffering from many perils of land pollution. But by acting upon Islamic teachings, it can be made clean, green, healthy and peaceful.

2. Burying Dead Bodies in Ground: Islam is a divine religion and perfect with respect to all aspects of life. Its teachings are wise and equally important for all. It lays much stress upon people to be clean, to make things clean and to promote cleanliness and purity in society so that neat and clean environment can be made unavoidable. This is the reason behind the phenomenon of burring dead bodies in land according to the Islamic teachings. Islam does not allow people to burn dead bodies in open air, as it is the cause of pollutions. It teaches people to place dead bodies in the ground and made this act much important regarding its reward. Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said which can be translated as:

”مَنْ صَلَّى عَلَيَّ جَنَازَةً فَلَهُ قِيرَاطٌ مِّنْ تَبِعَهَا حَتَّى يُقْضَى دَفْنُهَا فَلَهُ قِيرَاطَانِ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ
أَصْغَرُهُمَا مِثْلُ أَحَدٍ” ١٠

“Whoever attends the funeral procession till he offers the funeral prayer for it, will get a reward equal to one Qirat, and whoever accompanies it till burial, will get a reward equal to two Qirats." It was said, "What are two Qirats?" He replied, "Like two huge mountains”.

Burying dead body of man is therefore best practice, suggested by Islam for the betterment of environment. Through this act, land and air can be protected from getting pollution.

3. Proper Waste Management: Proper disposal of waste is an important measure against land pollution for individuals as well as for industries. On daily basis, we need to ensure that our wastes are segregated so that we can dispose of them in the most efficient way. Industries should also make sure that they deal with waste in a way that does not adversely affect the land and its environment.

4. Bio-Fertilizers: In order to mitigate land pollution, agricultural activities need to be improved with environment friendly fertilizers. Bio-fertilizers have to be produced to enrich the soil. Besides, poisonous pesticides should be reduced to maximum level so that the health of human can be assured certainly.

5. Avoid Plastic Usage: The use of plastic in different forms has been inevitable part of our daily lives. From vegetables to meat and many other products are served in plastic packing. This greatly increases the problem of land contamination. Now it has become imperative to say a big NO to plastic. Polyethylene bags and other plastic material should be banned and these should be replaced with paper and fabric bags.

6. Awareness About Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: There are many items we use in our routine, that can be reused and recycled again and again. Due to lack of knowledge or the sense of ignorance, we consider them useless and deposit it in the garbage. Therefore, it is a dire need to propagate the message of reduce, recycle and reuse among the masses, so that land pollution can be tackled.

7. Propagating Islamic Teachings: There are several injunctions of Islam about pollution. The glorious Qur’an contains approximately 200 verses that describe different elements of environment. In addition, approximately, 2190 hadiths about trees, 409 hadiths about cleanliness and 55 hadiths about environment are narrated in the collection of hadiths compiled by different schools of thought. However, majority of Muslims is still oblivious to Islamic principles regarding environment. Now the religious scholars must come forward to make people aware about land pollution in the light of Islamic teachings. They should give Islamic education to the public about rights and duties towards the environment.

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Responsibility of Man Towards the Land According to Islamic Teachings:

Land is the property of Allah and man has come to it as a representative from Him. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said:

إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا خَضِرَةٌ حُلْوَةٌ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مُسْتَخْلِفُكُمْ فِيهَا فَنَظَرٌ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ¹¹

“The world is green and beautiful and Allah has appointed you as His Khalifa over it. He sees how you work”.

The land that Allah has made the source of economy for man, is completely polluted by him. Indeed, all his actions involved in the pollution of land have proved to be a campaign of his own destruction. Allah has mentioned the word “Al Arz” 446 times in the glorious Qur’an to remind man his responsibilities towards the land but he turned a deaf ear to the injunctions of Islam.

According to Islam, man has a number of responsibilities to make land free of pollution. All these responsibilities can be concluded into the following categories:

1. Irrigating land
2. Avoiding to hurt living things and
3. Refraining from changing the order of land

Making the land green is one of his top responsibilities. The Holy Qur’an and (ﷺ) have directed man to this responsibility on many occasions. The significance of this thing can be conceived from the fact that even the Jews were handed over the land of Khyber on the condition that they would irrigate it and will receive half of its production.

عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ عَامِلَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ خَيْرٌ بِشَطْرِ مَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرٍ أَوْ زَرْعٍ¹²

The second most responsibility of man is to behave politely with all living things. He has a duty not to injure the creatures of Allah. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said,

لَا تَتَّخِذُوا شَيْئًا فِيهِ الرُّوحُ غَرَضًا¹³

“Do not make anything having life as a target”.

Last but not the least, man should be careful of laws of nature. He should never engage in activities that endanger the natural structure and quality of land. Allah says in the Holy Qur’an,

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا¹⁴

“And do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order”.

Allah made everything as benefit for the man and he is responsible for all his deeds. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said,

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ¹⁵

“Every man is a caretaker and he must be asked about his subordinates”.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of man to use land properly, take care of it and pass it to the next generations in good condition. He should use the blessings of Allah in such a way that they do not pollute the land, nor become the source of destruction for the existence of any life on land.

Conclusion:

All the lines of approach lead to a conclusion that land pollution has become a burning issue in today's world. The people who want to change the laws of nature and disrupt the system of nature, are great mischief from the Islamic point of view. There are many texts and general instructions in the Qur'an and Hadith that prohibit man from polluting and poisoning the earth's atmosphere and its resources with calamitous activities. To spread mischief in the land means to damage its natural beauty and its proportionately structure. Islam has declared strict punishments against those who cause mischief in land and it has proclaimed great reward for those who take part in making the land sustainable and free of pollution. Now, time has come to spread the teachings of Islam among the masses in order to get the rid of this menace.

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