

THE HOLY QURAN AND VEGETATION

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The Holy Quran commends and compels attention of mankind to observe and contemplate about the wonders of creation, their grandeur and splendour, their variety and diversity, and then to draw inferences as to who other than Allah could have caused their existence and subsequent maintenance. Among the creation of Heavens and Earth, while the former is decorated with 'Jannat', the garden of bliss, the latter is also provided with every type of vegetation and animals of all kinds (Sura Luqman, Ayat-10). Indeed when Aadm was asked to quit the garden of heaven where he and Eve were provided with plenty of things, they were directed to descend on earth where also they would be supplied with means of livelihood (edible vegetation such as fruit etc.).

THE BALANCE OF NATURE: Balance and beauty, symmetry and harmony proportion and greatness, variety and diversity and some of the attributes and key notes of creation. Balance of nature is responsible for indefinite continuation of smooth life on Earth for a time appointed. If this balance is disturbed through injudicious exploitation of the components of which the balance is established, the consequences are harmful and even disastrous if the disruption is serious. The modern concept of preservation of ecological system is of paramount importance for the living communities. For instance, if natural forests are destroyed beyond their productivity, it may result in accelerated erosion flash floods and consequential loss of life and property. In Sura Al-Hajr (15), Ayat 19, 20, 21, the Almighty Allah Says:

"And the earth We have spread out (like a carpet); And set thereon mountains firm and immovable; And produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.

And We have provided therein means of subsistence for you and for those for whose sustenance, ye are not responsible.

And there is not a thing but its sources and treasures (inexhaustible) are with Us; But We only send down thereof in due and ascertainable measures".

All the necessities for life exist and are produced in due balance and measure. The soil supports vegetation which in turn supports animals. There is inter-dependence but none exists at the cost of the other. There is an infinite chain of gradation and co-existence.

Again in Sura Abbas (80, Ayat 25 to 32), the Almighty reveals:

And We split the earth in fragments:

And produce therein corn,

And grapes and nutritious plants,

And olives and dates,

And enclosed gardens dense with lofty trees,

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And fruits and fodder,
For use and convenience to you and your cattle.

These verses spell out the most modern concepts of Mixed Farming, Farm Forestry and Shelterbelts. Single cropping practices have impoverished the soils in advanced countries of both the Old and New World and has caused site deterioration. The standing crops are also subjected to the ravages of climatic hazards and plant pests to a greater degree. Under mixed farming conditions, the fertility of the soil is self recuperated and pest population is kept under automatic check. Similarly shelterbelts protect the crops from extremes of cold and hot weather, besides mitigating the onslaughts of dry and desiccating storms and snow drifts. These holy verses also lay a pointer to apportionment of land, obviously according to capability, for growing crops, fruit plants, fodder and trees so as to maintain a self-sufficient balanced farm.

Great Balance

Sura Rahman (55, Ayats to 12) forcefully brings out the great balance which Allah has established so that mankind may not transgress the balance.

DRY-FARMING: In Sura Baqara (2, Ayat 265), the parable of a high and rich garden which receives abundant rain water and yields double harvest, is narrated. But if heavy rain is not forthcoming little moisture (even dew) is sufficient. I consider this to be a hint to practice dry-farming technique where water supply is inadequate. In our country, whereas the canal irrigated lands are developed, the dry and semi-arid tract had been neglected in the past. There is great potential for their development through scientific research. Among other things such lands can be developed by soil and water conservation methods, by providing small and smaller dams, and by utilizing the land strictly according to its capability. Many sciences are involved and an integrated approach is essential.

SAVE THE SOIL: In the Holy Quran, the heavenly gardens and paradise are frequently mentioned. Almost invariably these gardens are associated with rivers/canals flowing BENEATH them. I consider that flowing of rivers beneath the gardens is very significant. Our canal systems are designed on gravity flow laws with the result that water-logging and salinity have afflicted our land on a large scale. If the canals could be run much below the ground level and water pumped up wherever needed for irrigation, the land could be saved from water-logging and the other menace. Such canals have been designed and constructed in USSR.

TREES ARE SACRED AND BLESSED: The Almighty Allah and His true followers are intimately associated with trees. During Miraj-un-Nabi the Majesty of Allah is enshrined close to a Ziziphous(ber) tree at the highest and farthest point of infinity. (Sura 53, Ayat 14 to 16). The eminence of trees could not be raised to greater heights than depicted in these beautiful verses. Indeed Prophet Moses while travelling with his family, perceived a fire towards Mount Tur, set out to find out, a voice was heard from a tree, saying, "O Moses! Verily I am God, the Lord of the worlds." (Sura 28, Ayat 29 to 30). Here again Allah Who is otherwise omnipresent has manifested Himself in close proximity of a tree! In Sura Alwaqia (56, Ayat 72 to 73), the Almighty Allah enquires of mankind as to who grows the tree which feeds the fire other

than Him and indeed it is His monumental handiwork and a source of comfort and convenience for the inhabitants of the wilderness. Incidentally, these verses bring out the importance and maintenance of wild-life also. In His infinite wisdom God has bestowed the privilege of worship to trees also:

“And the herbs and the trees.

Both (alike) prostrate themselves in adoration” Sura Rehman (55, Ayat 6).

SOME IMPORTANT TREES MENTIONED IN THE QURAN: As already described, very high status is granted to Ziziphous (ber) tree. Indeed it is an all-purpose blessing. It affords good and strong timber, excellent fuel, nutritious fodder and good fruit besides being beautiful and dense shade provider. It responds favourably to copious irrigation and resists drought. Olive is also very highly spoken of in Quran, (Sura Nur, Ayat 35), wherein Allah describes Him-self as the light of the Heavens and the Earth, like a brilliant star from a lamp lit from the blessed stree of Olive! The olive tree is comparatively a hardy tree, its natural habitat is spread all over the drier parts of the Mediterranean region. The fruit is edible and is rich in vitamins. The oil which is extracted from fruit, is gifted with many health-promoting qualities, besides illuminating power which generates cool steady flame pleasing to the eyes. The common Pakistani olive tree is wild of the size of a large shrub. There is no doubt about the suitability of many tracts for the cultivation of fruit-bearing improved varieties of olive, in Pakistan. In Sura Jin (95, Ayat-1) the Almighty Allah swears by the trees of fig and olive, Mount Sinai and Mecca. Both the fig and olive trees in their fine forms, yield excellent fruit but they can retrogress into worthless shrubs under unfavourable environment.

Mention of fruit trees is frequently made in the Holy Quran, the most commonly described trees are: data palm, grapes, pomegranates, olive, fig and others.

COMPULSIONS OF MODERN LIFE IN RELATION TO TREES: The natural resources of the World are fast dwindling. The history of wars and expolits for supremacy and expansion of the middle ages is repeating itself with redoubled force and power driven from nuclear energy. Indeed the entire world is faced with many a crisis. Among these, the energy gap is staring mankind in the face. The world is turning back to coal and firewood. Similarly the timber resources of the world also stand depleted. For a country like Pakistan which is already short of both these resources, tree planting practices must be pushed forward both in the forest areas and agricultural land. For paper production also, the raw material in the form of grasses and wood requires to be build up. Commercial plantations of bamboos and bidi-leaf trees should be raised. Much extension work is needed to push up these schemes in a systematic manner. Rapid urbanisation has replaced much of fresh air with foul-smelling odours from open sewerage and defective underground systems. If this deterioration continues at this pace, the day is not far when we may have to buy oxygen gas cylinders for breathing purposes. We must have 5 to 15 per cent of land in new parks town schemes reserved for and gardens.

New Ideas

New ideas must be injected in the tree-planting campaigns. Instead of frittering away funds and energy all over Pakistan, works should be concentrated on areas where trees are

deficient and tracts where trees would play special role for protection against standstorms and other climatic hazards. For instance, predominant cotton growing districts which are generally adjacent to the sandy deserts should receive first priority and the works should be continued for at least three years. The law for planting four trees per acre in the colony areas must be enforced. Large farms must devote part of their farm for tree culture. Demonstration farms, forestry farms should be established both on voluntarily surrendered private areas as well as on part of canal irrigated plantations. The curricula of forest schools and colleges should be modified to include landscaping and planting of useful trees of commercial value on the farms. The emphasis should be on fast growing trees yielding quick returns. The Holy Quran is replete with glowing description of gardens and trees and it would be a great pity if we, who profess to be the followers, nay, the torch-bearers of Islam should lag behind in implementing His manifesto Green and greenery are pleasing to the eyes and elevate the soul. Green is the colour and symbol of Islam. Green is the dome at Madina Munawwara. Let us enrich our environment with green and fragrant vegetation for the benefit of our body and soul. And now I close in praise of Allah, while singing:-

He is God, the Greater, the Evolver,
The Bestower of Farms(or colour),
To Him belong the most beautiful names,
Whatever is in the Heavens and earth,
Doth declare His praises and glory,
And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.
Sura Hashr (59, Ayat-24).