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**Islamic Approach to Environmental Sustainability:
Review of Worldview, Philosophy & Teachings**

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Presentation Outline

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Inadequacy of Neoclassical Theoretical Framework
- ▶ Islamic Worldview & Its Implications
- ▶ Islam & Environmental Sustainability
- ▶ Conclusion

Introduction

- ▶ In the early literature on development, per capita GDP was considered a sufficient enough barometer to judge the level of development in a country.
- ▶ Back then, the long run macroeconomic literature focused on capital accumulation as one of the primary instruments to ensure development.
- ▶ Haq (1963) gave the concept of functional inequality in 1960s.
- ▶ However, functional inequality of income and social utility of greed could not ensure trickle down of economic growth benefits.



Introduction

- ▶ Haq (1995) later on accepted that humans are ‘means’ as well as ‘ends’ of any development process or initiative.
- ▶ He finally accepted that ‘Ends’ cannot be sacrificed for the future, even when benefits are certain, and ignoring ‘ends’ undermines the entire development process.
- ▶ Rather than economic growth taking care of poverty, it was realized that taking care of poverty would take care of economic growth.



Introduction

- ▶ But, during the last 30 years, a lot of other challenges have sprung up, like:
 - ▶ Environmental resource conservation
 - ▶ Equitable income distribution
 - ▶ Intergenerational equity
 - ▶ Enhancing social infrastructure.
- ▶ Is rapid growth accompanied by equally rapid depletion of environmental resources and high fiscal deficit and public debt burden a truly admirable growth model?
- ▶ It is now realized that for growth to be sustainable, the growth shall provide widespread benefits and must not come at the expense of worsening income distribution and environment quality.



Introduction

- ▶ In a World Bank report, it was highlighted that the use of energy per capita in high income countries is more than 5 times as much as in developing countries.
- ▶ With only 15% of the world's population, high income countries use more than half of its energy (World development Indicators, 2006).
- ▶ In Stern Review (2006), it was highlighted that United States is found to be the most polluting country in the world together with Europe which accounts for around 70% of World's pollution.



Introduction

- ▶ On the theoretical front, Western economics has become a discipline devoid of values.
- ▶ Overreliance on pareto efficiency paralyzes the equity and ethical concerns of development policy change. Helping millions of poor to make them better off while making any single rich person worse off is an inefficient outcome as per neoclassical economics.
- ▶ Strikingly, some sport stars and showbiz professionals earn equivalent sum as compared to the entire GDP of many poor countries.



Introduction

- ▶ Neoclassical economics is neutral between ends. As long as people can put up dollar votes for their preferences, resources will be allocated on producing, marketing and distributing inessential goods even if a quarter of world population lives in poverty.
- ▶ Exploitation of the natural environment can be abated when individuals consider intergenerational welfare and justice to be important factors in their economic decisions.
- ▶ Islamic economics, unlike its Western counterpart, is a value-driven discipline replete with moral values that limits individual's consumption, and imposes significant social and religious responsibilities on individuals as guardians of the natural environment for future generations.



Introduction

- ▶ There is excessive consumption spending fueled by fiat money expansion. Capacity of fiat money expansion is incompatible with finite real and natural resources. (Khalid, 2002, p. 332).
- ▶ Free riding on natural resources and overexploitation of common property resources and essential bio-diversity requires an ethical perspective which the market alone with its price mechanism can not provide (Hassan, 2006).
- ▶ Preservation, conservation and restraint require a guiding and incentive system which an individualistic self-interest based paradigm is insufficient to provide.



Introduction

- ▶ Natural resources and elements of ecology have a different lifespan than the private owners. Private property rights in an individualistic self-interest paradigm grants limitless ownership without taking into account the responsibilities towards society and humanity (ASTRÖM, 2011).
- ▶ Na'iya (2007) suggests that the effective solution to the environmental problems lies on the overall worldview which spells out the relationship between man, nature and his Creator.



Inadequacy of Neo-Classical Theoretical Framework

- ▶ The mainstream neo-classical consumer theory overemphasizes the role of consumer sovereignty which results in exogenous treatment of preferences in theoretical economic models.
- ▶ After Renaissance in Europe, Western social sciences originated and developed under the influence of Social-Darwinist worldview.
- ▶ Hence, it was inevitable to see the emergence of extractive institutions at the macro level which resulted in growing income inequalities and the rapid surge of consumerism which had now challenged the planetary boundaries of sustainable existence, let alone sustainable development.



Inadequacy of Neo-Classical Theoretical Framework

- ▶ Hence, this has resulted in:
 - ▶ Ethical neutrality between contrasting ends.
 - ▶ Wedge between market and social costs of environmental goods and resources.
 - ▶ Overexploitation of common property resources.
 - ▶ Free-riding on public goods.
 - ▶ Intergenerational inequity in resource distribution.



Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ Islamic worldview extends the responsibility of humans to society, future generations, and other living species on planet with accountability for every intentional act.
- ▶ Islamic worldview regards humans as trustees for whatever material resources and mental faculties they come to possess in this world.
- ▶ Islamic worldview based on Tawhid (oneness of God) and belief in afterlife accountability deeply influences preferences, behavior and choices.
- ▶ It not only asks for change in some choices and giving religion a place in time and resource allocation, rather it equips the believers with spiritual rationality to act in ethical ways for the eternal bliss.

Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ In the mainstream economics, utility (satisfaction) is assumed to be attained when the person consumes the material goods and services which bring satisfaction.
- ▶ Even though, there is room in utility maximization models to incorporate empathy, altruism etc, but, the models remain neutral between ends.



Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ With belief in Allah, a Muslim's scope of life and objective is different. His principal goal is to seek Allah's pleasure and succeed in the life hereafter.
- ▶ So, a Muslim is supposed to make every decision in a way to seek Allah's pleasure rather than pursuing self-pleasure and satisfaction “*as an end in itself*”.



Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ As per Islam, this world is a place for test and this test requires some people to be privileged and some to be deprived.
- ▶ The deprived and privileged are both tested for patience and thankfulness to Allah and how they take care of society and its needs.
- ▶ Hence, this worldview put the focus of all human beings towards the fact that material resources they enjoy are all blessings of Allah and these are instruments for this test.



Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ Islamic economics incorporates ethical values and excludes from the consumption bundle various goods which bring either private loss or welfare loss to the society.
- ▶ Furthermore, the ethical values in Islamic economics are more comprehensive.
- ▶ Second, Islamic economics brings a long term perspective to the pursuit of self-interest by informing humans about the positive and negative consequences of their actions and choices in the life hereafter.
- ▶ Resultantly, an Islamic economy will have to rely less on regulation and legal governance to encourage ethical behavior.

Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ Rather than complimenting humans in their animalistic instincts to keep having one-eyed focus on material well-being only, Islam inculcates piousness, kindness, cooperation and communal responsibility in humans.
- ▶ In some instances, Islam guides explicitly to avoid extravagance, lavishness and using certain products and services which harm a human's ethical existence and well being either individually and/or harm the society in the process.



Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ Islam provides such meaningful conditioning which enables bringing the right balance between human aspirations and the physical limits.
- ▶ Religion also promises salvage from the limitedness of this worldly life in heaven which will be awarded to the most righteous people.
- ▶ This, in turn, provides a permanent incentive to choose righteous behavior as an end with the hope and fear of deterministic results in the life hereafter.



Islamic Worldview & its Implications

- ▶ With the concept of afterlife accountability, Islam immensely influences intertemporal choice and behavior.
- ▶ It helps in private economic agents (consumers and producers) to modify their actions in such a way that takes the externalities into consideration and also their own welfare, both in this world and afterwards.
- ▶ Afterlife accountability stimulate positive change in behavior in a much more comprehensive and permanent manner than any regulation or material incentive could possibly do.



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Incorporating social cost in private actions**

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“I swear by Allah, one cannot become fully Muslim until he (or she) likes for others whatever he (or she) likes for himself (or herself).”

(Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. I, p. 14)

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“He who cuts a lote-tree [without justification], Allah will send him to Hellfire.”

(Narrated in Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 5239)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Promising private rewards to socially desirable actions**

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“There is none better amongst the believers who plants a tree from which a person, or an animal eats thereof. It is regarded as having given a charitable gift for which there is great recompense.”

(Narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol 3: 513)

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“Whoever plants trees, God will give him reward to the extent of their fruit.”

(Narrated in Musnad, v, 415)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Promising private rewards to socially desirable actions**

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“Whoever reclaims and cultivates dry, barren land, will be rewarded by God for the act. So long as men and animals benefit from it, He will record it as almsgiving.”

Al-Munawi, Fayd al-Qadir, vi, 39; Haythami, Majmau al-Zawaaid, iv, 67-8.



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“If a Muslim plants a tree or grow grains and a bird, a person or an animal eats from it, it will be counted as a charity for him.”

(Bukhara, "al-Khars ve'l-Muzara", Muslim, "Musakaat", H. No: 12)

“Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit, he will be rewarded.”

(Narrated in Ahmad b.Hanbal, Musnad, IV, 61, 374)

“Whoever plants a tree and it matures, Allah plants a tree in paradise for that person.”

(Narrated in Ahmad b.Hanbal, Musnad, IV, 61)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“If the Hour is imminent and anyone of you has a palm shoot (to plant) in his hand and is able to plant it before the Hour strikes, then he should do so and he will be rewarded for that action.”

(Narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari)

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“Removing harmful things from the road is an act of charity (Sadaqah).”

(Narrated by Abu Dharr Al-Ghafari)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“A good deed done to a beast is as good as doing good to a human being; while an act of cruelty to a beast is as bad as an act of cruelty to human beings,” and that: “Kindness to animals was promised by rewards in Life Hereafter.”

(Mishkat al-Masabih; Book 6; Chapter 7, 8:178)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Ensuring Equity, Absolute Justice & MSB=MSC**

► The Holy Quran says that:

“He who does good of an atom's weight, he will see it. And he, who does ill of an atom's weight, he will see it.”

(Az-Zilzaalaha: Verse 7-8)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Protection of Bio-Diversity**

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“On the day of Judgment, Allah will ask those who kill a sparrow unfairly.”

(Narrated in Muslim, Hadith No57)

► Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“If anyone wrongfully kills even a sparrow, let alone anything greater, he will face God's interrogation.”

(Narrated in Mishkat al Masabih)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

- ▶ It is narrated in Sahih Muslim that:

“A man suffered from intense thirst while on a journey. He found a well, came to it, drank (water) and then came out. Suddenly, a dog appeared with its tongue out due to thirst. The man said: This dog has suffered from thirst as I had suffered from it. He reached down the well and brought water for the dog. So, Allah appreciated this act of his and pardoned him. Then, the companions asked: ‘O Allah’s Messenger, is there reward even for (serving) such animals?’ Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: ‘Yes, there is a reward for the one who makes a service to any living being.’”

(Narrated in Sahih Muslim: Book #26, Hadith No. 5577)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

“The Prophet(pbuh) was asked whether acts of charity even to the animals were rewarded by Allah or not. He replied: 'yes, there is a reward for acts of charity to every beast alive.”

(Narrated by Abu Huraira, Bukhari, 3:322.



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

- ▶ Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

“The one to whom his horse is a source of reward and who keeps it in the path of God, and ties it by a long rope in a pasture or a garden. Such a person will get a reward equal to what the horse’s long rope allows it to eat in the pasture or the garden. And if the horse breaks its rope and crosses one or two hills, then all marks of its hoofs and its dung will be counted as good deeds for its owner. And if it passes by a river and drinks from it, then that will also be regarded as a good deed on the part of its owner.”

(Narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari, 3:559)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► It is narrated in Sahih Muslim that:

“We were on a journey with the Messenger of God, and He (peace be upon Him) left us for a while. During his absence, we saw a bird called Hummara with its two young and so we took the young ones. The mother bird was circling above us in the air, beating its wings in grief, when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) came back and said: ‘Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its young? Return them to her!’”

(Narrated in Sahih Muslim)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) was seen wiping the face of his horse with his gown. When asked why He was doing that, He replied:

‘Last night, I was reprimanded by God for having neglected my horse.’”

(Narrated in Muwatta Imam Malik)



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

- ▶ In order to protect land, forests and wildlife, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) created inviolable zones known as hima and haram, in which resources were to be left untouched.
- ▶ Hima applies particularly to wildlife and forestry and usually designates an area of land where grazing and woodcutting are restricted, or where certain animal species are protected.



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Conservation of Natural Resources**

“But waste not by excess, for Allah does not love the wasters.”

(Al-Anam: Verse 141)

► When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) saw Sa'd performing wudu, He (peace be upon Him) said:

“What is this? You are wasting water.” Sa'd replied: “Can there be wastefulness while performing ablution?” The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) replied: “Yes even if you perform it in a flowing river.”

(Narrated in Ibn-e-Maja)

Islam & Environmental Sustainability

- ▶ **Conservation of Natural Resources**
- ▶ Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said:

“(Among the)... three types of people with whom God, on the Day of Resurrection, will neither exchange words, nor look at ... is the one who possesses an excess of water but withholds it from others. God will say to him: ‘Today, I shall withhold from you my grace as you withheld from others the excess of what you had, but which you did not create.’”

- ▶ *(Narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari)*



Islam & Environmental Sustainability

► **Informing About Value of Natural Resources**

► In one verse, the Holy Quran says:

“Say: Have you considered, if on one morning, the water you have seeps away, who then could bring you clear-flowing water?”

(Al-Mulk: Verse 30)



Conclusion

- ▶ Growth has happened in some countries, but a vast majority of people still live in poverty.
- ▶ Growth itself has come at a cost. It has challenged planetary boundaries, created more inequality and widened the gap between poor and rich nations.
- ▶ Islamic economics with its distinctive ethical principles can fulfill the ethical void by encouraging as well as reinforcing environmental friendly choices and behavior.



Conclusion

- ▶ Lastly, we mention a verse from Holy Quran which warns us that on the day of judgment, the seemingly free natural resources we use and exploit can be and will be made alive to speak of the treatment they received from us on the day when nothing else can be more disadvantageous than to have sins we carry forward to the day of judgment.
- ▶ “*When the Earth is shaken with a violent shaking, and the Earth throws out her burdens, and man says: ‘What has befallen her?’ - on that Day, she shall tell her story!*”

(Az-Zilzaalaha: Verse 1-4)

Thank You

Questions & Feedback

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