

Islamic Teachings and the Contemporary Challenge of Water Pollution: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Water, like air and land, is one of the greatest blessings of Allah. The water is an essential for life and it is the sole reason for its existence. Without it, no creature can exist in this world. Allah has made water very common blessing according to its need. This blessing is free for all. Rich and poor can use it with great ease and without any restriction. Nothing is an obstacle in the way of using water for different purposes. Everyone can get directly benefit from it. Today, the planet is suffering from alarming levels of water pollution due to various causes. Industrial waste, extravagance of plastic and many other harmful activities have polluted water extremely. Therefore, hundreds of thousands of people are suffering from serious water-born diseases. Animals and plants are too facing health related problems. Other aquatic species are in danger situation as well. Water pollution has indeed forced them to the verge of their destruction. Islam, in this regard has prohibited all such actions which cause the deterioration of water. Being the complete code of life, it doesn't only enjoin the mankind but also provide complete guidance regarding the preservation of environment in order to keep water pure, clean and healthy for all living creatures.

Keywords: Water pollution and Islam, Sources of water pollution, Effects of water pollution, Solutions of water pollution

Introduction:

Water pollution is a global problem. Today, all living things are endangered by water pollution. Therefore clean water is essential for the protection of all living things on earth and especially for human life. There are clear guidelines and precautionary measures given in the Qur'an and Hadith to deal with this issue and by following them we can overcome the problem of this pollution. This is the religious and national responsibility of Muslims to protect the water from dirt and pollutants and to provide clean water for future generations as well. It is the responsibility of government to provide clean water and at the same time, the people and religious scholars should also play their main role in this regard. Therefore, as a citizen we have to perform our due role for controlling water pollution. We can make sure the accessibility of pure and clean water by refraining from actions pertaining to its pollution. We have to stop using plastic, minimize the use harmful fertilizers, arrange the treatment plants for polluted water so that water pollution can be brought under control. This way, serious health complications caused by water pollution can also be controlled. This article discusses the causes and impacts of water pollution and suggests some remedial measures to be taken for controlling water pollution in the light of Islamic teachings.

What is pollution?

Man had to make good use of all the blessings that Allah has bestowed him on the earth. He would take care of his environment so that he and his descendants would be blessed with the blessings that come from this natural law, and this world would be the cradle of peace and security for all human beings. But man's evil deeds and selfish thinking have put a dent in this divine system. As a result of human deeds, various kinds of pollution have arisen in the world. The world is in the great riot, which can be extracted from the following verse of the Holy Quran:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ¹

“Corruption has spread over land and sea from what men have done themselves”.

Pollution means adding harmful elements to the natural environment that can cause a negative change in the environment and infect living as well as inanimate objects. The meaning of pollution is defined in the Learner's Dictionary in following words:

“The action or process of making land, water, air, etc., dirty and not safe or suitable to use”.²

The American dictionary of Heritage defines the word pollution as:

“The act or process of polluting or the state of being polluted, especially the contamination of soil, water or the atmosphere by the discharge of harmful substances.”³

Though, the definition of water pollution have been given in several books in different words, but all these definitions can be summarized in following words: water pollution is nothing but a deterioration state of water caused by several pollutants which has adverse effects to every living thing.

The Concept of Pollution in the Quran:

In the Qur'an al-Hakim, the word pollution is mentioned as رجس and رجز which means “Dirt”. Almighty Allah says in the Holy Quran,

وَيَبِائِكَ فَطَهِّرْ ۝ وَالرُّجُزَ فَاهْجُرْ ۝⁴

“And keep your clothes clean, and stay away from dirt.”

In this verse Allah has ordered man to be neat and clean and try to be safe from dirt. This verse gives a complete sense of pollution

Kinds of pollution:

Different estimates of pollution have different effects. There are four main types of pollution in terms of these different ways.

Air Pollution:

Atmosphere plays a significant role in the survival of human life. A coil of air covering the same space of miles is a mixture of different gases including nitrogen 78.09%, oxygen 20.95%, argon 0.93 and carbon dioxide 0.03%⁵. Life is guaranteed for many invisible creatures. During our twenty-four-hour life, we receive oxygen from the atmosphere to move, to function, and to survive. Gentle and delicate winds blow in the vastness of its atmosphere, on which the caravan of clouds floats by Allah Almighty's will and intention. As Allah says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۖ وَأَنزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً طَهُورًا⁶

“And He is the One who has sent the winds conveying good news before His mercy, and we have sent down purifying water from the heavens.”

Then, with the same rain, flowers, greenery and happy songs begin to resound on the earth. In the same way the food of human beings and other living beings is arranged. Allah has mentioned this fact in several places of the Holy Quran. Following verse is one of the examples in this connection.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ²⁴ ۚ أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا²⁵ ۚ ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا²⁶ ۚ فَأَنبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا²⁷ ۚ وَعَبَبْنَا وَقُضْبًا²⁸ ۚ وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا²⁹ ۚ وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا³⁰ ۚ وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا³¹ ۚ مَّتَاعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ³² ۚ⁷

“So, the man should consider his food, how well We poured water, then how nicely We split the earth, then We grew in it grain, and grapes and greens, and olive and date-palms, and gardens, full of thick trees, and fruits and fodder, as a benefit for you and your cattle.”

This means that these various natural changes in the atmosphere, such as, the abundance of oxygen in the air, the movement of winds, the precipitation of clouds, the sun, the heat, the cold and the fluctuations are in the best interest of man. It is very important for life and other living things. Due to the misbehavior of human beings towards the atmosphere and the use of unnatural factors, air pollution emerged as a serious issue. When the natural pattern of the atmosphere altered in various ways, the atmosphere reduced to a state which caused more harmful for all.

Air pollution has created many problems and diseases for human health. It has been distorted by man and resultantly he is suffering numerous diseases. At the same time, air pollution has become the main reason for rise in temperature which has provoked global warming.

Land pollution:

One third of this planet is land and two thirds is water. The land mass of the dry land is approximately 20 million square kilometers. The source of the birth of the human race is the earth. Since the essence of the earth is clay and that is the beginning of humanity, as God says:

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ⁸

He has created man from dry clay, ringing like pottery

Allah Almighty created land with tremendous blessings and charming beauties to make it soothing, comfortable and ease for the use of man. He planted trees and plants on it. Issued water canals and springs. The lush green fields made the forests green, the flowers flowed, and the light and darkness, the orderly arrangements of the climate were issued, so that the living conditions of the human beings could be made easier. However, we the human beings have made this earth so ugly and painful because of our random lifestyles merely for the sake of contentment for own interest. Due to the self-interests, man has deteriorated the properties of land greatly. Now a day, there are several hazards for human health that are being reported as the cause of land pollution.

Noise Pollution:

Noise pollution is related to the sense of hearing. Hearing is one of the gifts awarded by Allah Almighty. The first thing that is counted as a blessing after human birth is hearing. So Allah says:

وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ⁹

“He made for your ears, eyes and hearts, so that you may be grateful”.

Hearing is an important source of acquiring knowledge. The hearing system inside the human body works with a special arrangement so that everything that vibrates makes a sound. This sound travels through waves by air, water and solid objects. The mass of these waves reaching human ears is ranging from 20 hertz to 20,000 hertz. If more or less massive waves of this frequency collide with human hearing, the human ear will not be able to hear it. When a sound power exceeds the limits of the hearing capacity of man, it becomes the cause of deafness. This is called "noise pollution". There are many factors that are taking their part in exacerbating this menace. Increasing vehicle population, unusual use of loud speakers of mosques and excessive use of speakers at shops or few reasons to name. The noise pollution produced in this way has dangerously disturbed the health of masses. As a result there are so many diseases being suffered by people everywhere in the world.

Water Pollution:

Water is the basis of life and this is the biggest proof of its importance. Allah says:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ¹⁰

“And we have made of water everything living; will they not then believe?”

Two thirds of this land consists of water. 97% of this water is in the form of oceans and 2% are Snow Mountains. These mountains are the sole cause of rain and snowfall. At the same time, due to rising temperatures, this water is used for land in the form of rivers and canals. Water has a naturally special color, smell and taste. When some unhealthy items change the natural properties of water, it gets polluted and this whole phenomena is called as “water pollution”. There are many causes of water pollution, such as placing glass of water on mouth and throwing garbage in the sea can be equal in contamination. Soil, sand and debris naturally pollute the water. Similarly, water pollution is also spread as a result of human activities. For example, industrial, animal and human waste are dumped in the passages and canals which is a major cause of water pollution. Agricultural and chemical drugs and pesticides pollute the water. Ocean pollution is caused by the dumping of crude oil and other consumables into the sea. All of these things together destroy the natural properties of water. In this way, water is becoming extremely harmful to health and environment.

Islamic Teachings about Water Pollution:

The role of water in the environment and the Islamic injunction for conservation of this vital element is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life. Plants, animals, and man are all dependent upon water. Therefore, Islam has provided clear instructions in the context of its purity and cleanliness. There are many injunctions of Islam in which polluting water has been made great malpractice. It has prohibited people against this evil and insisted them to make it clean and pure for every living being.

Prohibition of Water Contamination:

In view of the various properties, usefulness and importance of water, the Holy Prophet ﷺ strictly forbade people to polluting it. His teachings are transparently clear regarding water pollution. One of His Hadith is quoted here in this context.

لا يبولن أحدكم في الماء الدائم الذي لا يجري ثم يغتسل فيه¹¹

“None of you should urinate in stagnant water so that he can take a bath with it again”

Due to abundance of this gift of Allah, people would pollute water unnecessarily. Therefore, they would urinate in water due to their ignorance. The Holy Prophet ﷺ prohibited them from doing such act and inculcated the importance of clean and pure water in their minds. Therefore, the Holy Prophet ﷺ again and again prohibited people from urinating in stagnant water. He said:

In the light of this Hadith people are delivered a message by the Holy prophet ﷺ to avoid from indulging any actions that cause water pollution.

Prohibition of Taking Bath in the State of Junub (Impurity):

Islam has warned people on different occasions against water pollution. It has propagated awareness among them in this regards so that they make it a rule of thumb to protect water from any act of its pollution. There several hadiths of Holy Prophet ﷺ in which different states are mentioned which become the cause of water pollution. One of these is mentioned here:

لا يغتسل أحدكم في الماء الدائم وهو جنب، فقال كيف يفعل يا أبا هريرة؟ قال يتناولونه تناولا. 13

"None of you should take bath in stagnant water till he is junub. People asked from Hazrat Abu Hurairah R.A what to do then? He said, "Take water out of it and take a bath."

In this narration of the beloved Prophet ﷺ, people are cautioned not to take bath when they reach to the state of junub which means impurity. The reason is that, when a man in this state takes bath in stagnant water, the whole water gets polluted due to the mixing with impurities of man attached to his body.

Prohibition of Touching Water with Dirty Hands:

Islam has clear guidance with respect to the matters of life. None of the matter is left in the teachings of Islam. It has made man confident in the matters of his daily life. Similarly, it has informed man all the ways which to go the acts of polluting water. Likewise, it prohibits man from touching the utensils used for ablution when he gets up from his deep sleep. The Holy Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِذَا اسْتَيْقَظَ أَحَدُكُمْ مِنْ نَوْمِهِ فَلَا يَغْسِ يَدَهُ فِي الْإِنَاءِ حَتَّى يَغْسِلَهَا ثَلَاثًا فَإِنَّهُ لَا يَدْرِي أَيْنَ بَاتَتْ

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"It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet ﷺ said:

"When any one of you wakes from sleep, He should not dip his hand in the vessel until he has washed it three times, for none of you knows where his hand spent the night."

Islam has educated man regarding the water pollution with its every aspect. Even though, it provides him the minutest information in this connection so that he may be well aware of keeping water free of pollution.

Prohibition of Breathing in Water Vessels:

Furthermore, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has also cautioned people to be careful while drinking water. One of His hadiths, he said:

إِذَا شَرَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلَا يَتَنَفَسْ فِي الْإِنَاءِ الْخ. 15

"When one of you drinks water, don't breathe in a vessel"

The narrators explaining the reason for the prohibition, that while drinking water or any kind of beverage, by breathing in a vessel or glass, it is possible for some dirt of man to fall into the water through inhalation. Because it may become the harmful for others or may be the cause of detest of a person. Moreover, the state of water may change from cold to hot because of breathing.

The blessed teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ contain all the ways to prevent the water pollution. There is a need to follow these instructions in order to make sure its purity and cleanliness.

Causes and Impacts of Water Pollution:

Water pollution refers to the change in the true color and smell or taste of water. This change is caused by the mixing of any other substances or chemical compounds in the water. Water pollution has taken place in rivers and streams in our country. Due to the use of contaminated water, there is a high risk of contracting diseases like fever, intestinal issues, cholera, typhoid and many fatal diseases. That is why drinking contaminated water is extremely harmful for consumers. The following are the main causes of water pollution:

- 1) Incorporating polluted water from homes, factories and industries into rivers, streams and ponds.
- 2) Excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides during cultivation and they contaminate the water by incorporating rainwater.

- 3) Decreased amount of oxygen gas in water due to some factors. The amount of oxygen gas dissolved in water is usually 8 to 15 mg per liter, but it is often found in less water. Such water poses a threat to the life of aquatic animals and aquatic plants and often endangers their lives.
- 4) Contamination involves large amounts of bacteria in the water. By drinking such water, many kinds of diseases like fever, malaria, typhoid are caused.
- 5) Dissolving different types of salts such as sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, chloride or sulfate or carbonate in water is heinous for its nature. Normally the minimum amount of any type of salt in water is 500 mg per liter. This water is drinkable, but in most places the amount of salt in the water is many times more than this limit. Such water is not drinkable. It is not used for watering or for animals, whereas it is harmful to human health.
- 6) Disposal of industrial solid waste in seawater or discharge of poisonous chemicals into seawater endangers marine and aquatic animals terribly.

Controlling Measures for Water Pollution:

Water is a great blessing of Allah Almighty and it is the responsibility of all of us to protect water and protect it from contamination. It has been observed that water is wasted in car factories, factories especially in the leather industry and service stations. To prevent it, mechanism should be advised to re-use the used water and to set up a treatment plant for this purpose. In addition, they should be charged according to the amount of ground water they use. Water meters should be installed on tube wells and pressure pumps for this purpose. In addition, water used in parks, schools and public places should be arranged in such a way that it serves the surrounding plants. Moreover, some important measures mentioned below should be taken to control water pollution effectively.

- Wastewater pollutants should chemically be treated to convert them into non-toxic substances or to reduce their toxicity.
- Water pollution from organic pesticides can be reduced by using chemicals that are very specific and less stable in the production of pesticides.
- Oxidation ponds help in removing low levels of radioactive waste. The heat load can be reduced by using technologies such as cooling, cooling tanks, evaporation or wet cooling towers, and dry cooling towers. The purpose is to keep the water in rivers and streams from getting hot.
- Household waste and commercial waste should be stored in large, shallow ponds for several days. Due to the sunlight and the organic nutrients contained in the waste, a large number of bacteria that digest harmful waste will grow.
- Contaminated water can be regenerated in a suitable treatment plant and the same water can be reused in factories and irrigation. Such treated water, rich in phosphorus, potassium and nitrogen, is an excellent fertilizer.
- Appropriate and strict legislation needs to be enacted to require the industry to treat wastewater before it is discharged into rivers and the sea.
- Heavy metals such as cadmium, mercury, lead and nickel and other toxic substances can also be filtered out of industrial wastewater.

Conclusion:

The blessed life of Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ is the guarantor of the eternal prosperity of all human beings. In all matters of life, He provided guidance to His ummah. Water pollution is one of the major problems of modern times. Newspapers, magazines, print and electronic media organizations and associations are taking actions on its shortcomings and impurities. However, as a Muslim and a true follower of Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa, ﷺ we must follow His teachings in a credible manner. Therefore, following the guidance of Allah Almighty, ¹⁶ لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ the prevention of water pollution has been presented in the light of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. These teachings of Islam encompass the concept, causes and impacts of water pollution and solutions as well in the perspective of this menace. It is hoped that the Muslim Ummah and the nations of the world will benefit fully from these Islamic teachings in order to make water pollution free to greater extent.

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