

The Relevance of Ecological Teachings and Practices of Prophet Muḥammad to the Environmental Sustainability of Dhaka City

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Abstract

The paper briefly discusses the eco-religious teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and then connects them with the environmental sustainability of Dhaka city. It also explains why the Prophetic ecological guidelines are relevant to the restoration of Dhaka city's ecological sustainability and how a Muslim-majority city like Dhaka can really benefit from the Prophetic ecological teachings to solve its environmental problems. Based on the literature review and contextual analysis methods, the article correlates the Prophetic ecological teachings and practices with the environmental issues of the city. In so doing, the study presents an alternative approach to the solution of Dhaka city's environmental problems in the light of the Prophetic traditions. By growing awareness of ecological essentiality and motivating the city dwellers and administrators to the city's ecological sustainability, the paper contributes to the ecologically friendly development of the city and to the enrichment of the field of religion and ecology.

Keywords

Dhaka, ecology, teachings, Islam, environment, sustainability.

Introduction

Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) had a holistic environmental philosophy and ethics, which were based on the Qur'ān and the concepts of oneness (*tawḥīd*), stewardship (*khilāfah*), and trust (*amānah*). In his

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teachings and practical activities, the Prophet addressed ecological concerns such as upholding the natural environment, conserving natural resources, and showing mercy to animals. He encouraged sustainable behaviour instead of extravagant spending and other forms of luxury. He was always keenly aware of and committed to protecting the environment. Through his activities and responses to the environment, the Prophet clearly showed that humans had a responsibility to save the earth. His teachings remain as eternal and long-lasting sources of inspiration and motivation for Muslims and the current world's ecological sustainability. In this paper, we focus on the teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad, which are relevant to the present ecological issues, and suggest how these practices and teachings can promote environmental protection and motivate individual behaviours, actions, and moral obligations for ecological sustainability.

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is the most important economic, cultural, and scientific hub, but unfortunately, it is the third most polluted city in the world.¹ Although most of the inhabitants of Dhaka city are followers of Islam, they are unaware of their Prophetic ecological teachings. The core objective of this research paper is to explore the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad, and show how these teachings can play a decisive role in reducing the present unprecedented ecological crisis of Dhaka city.

Some contemporary scholars like Francesca de Châtel,² Arthur Saniotis,³ Ammar Awaise,⁴ Ustazah Nur Hidayah Azman,⁵ Md. Abu Sayem,⁶ and Rabia Aamir,⁷ among others, attempted to focus on the

¹ M. S. Siddique, "Environmental Pollution and Its Control in Dhaka," *The Business Post*, January 5, 2022, <https://businesspostbd.com/opinion/environmental-pollution-and-its-control-in-dhaka>.

² Francesca de Châtel, "Prophet Muhammad—A Pioneer of Environment," *IslamiCity*, March 2, 2010, <https://www.islamicity.org/3772/prophet-mohammed-a-pioneer-of-the-environment/>.

³ Arthur Saniotis, "Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics," *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life* 6 (2011): 155-71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-011-0173-8>.

⁴ Ammar Awaise, "Simple Lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad," *Islam Explained*, January 25, 2017, <https://islamexplained.info/2017/01/25/simple-lifestyle-of-prophet-muhammad/>.

⁵ Ustazah Nur Hidayah Azman, "Five Things Prophet Taught us about Environment," *Muslim.Sg*, September 18, 2023, <https://muslim.sg/articles/5-things-prophet-taught-us-about-protecting-the-environment>.

⁶ Md. Abu Sayem, "Islamic Teaching and Practice of Environmental Ethics in Bangladesh: A Case Study," *QUEST: Studies on Religion and Culture in Asia* 3 (2018): 1-28; Abu Sayem, "Islam and Environmental Ethics: A Qur'ānic Approach," *Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (2021): 157-72, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v60i2.1438>.

ecological teachings of the Prophet and considered him the pioneer of ecological sustainability. Their scholarly works show deeper insights into the environmental teachings of the Prophet by growing an awareness in the human mind of ecological equilibrium. These scholarly contributions are inspiring and useful resources for developing the present research paper from the context of the ecological crisis of Dhaka city. Since the literature review shows that there is no work done on the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad regarding Dhaka city's ecological sustainability, we explore this field by focusing on the ecological teachings of Prophet Muḥammad and their present relevance, importance, and necessity to restore the ecological sustainability of Dhaka city.

This research adopts the method of qualitative approach, for it accumulates knowledge from existing research works related to the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad in connection with the ecological sustainability of Dhaka city. The present research relies on both primary and secondary sources. By reviewing some relevant literary works like books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and general internet sites, the required data were collected, based on which a theoretical framework was developed. The primary sources mainly comprise the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions (*sunan*), while the secondary sources are some selective books, journals, websites, etc., that are related to the ecological issues of Dhaka city and the ecological prescriptions of Prophet Muḥammad.

Ecological Teachings and Practices of Prophet Muḥammad

Prophet Muḥammad was sent as a mercy for the worlds.⁸ Throughout his life, he emphasized moderation in all aspects of life instead of extravagant spending and luxury. He promoted the concept of “stewardship,” which signifies the Qur'ānic term “*khilāfah*” (human as a viceroy of God on earth) and “*amānah*” (custodianship or trust), for being responsible for the creation of God. In this regard, the core policy of the Prophet was: “Do not cause harm or be harmed.”⁹ Some basic points of the Prophetic ecological teachings and practices are noted below.

⁷ Rabia Aamir, “Qur'ānic Worldview and the Environment: The Prophet Muḥammad as an Environmental Ethicist,” *Islamic Studies* 63, no. 3 (2024): 315-34, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v63i3.3137>.

⁸ Qur'ān 21:107; the translation is of Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Medina: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 1420 AH).

⁹ Muḥammad b. Yazīd b. Mājāh, *Sunan*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), ḥadīth no. 2340.

Prophet Muḥammad inculcated a sense of accountability in the human mind for the earth communities and the environment, saying, “The world is sweet and green, and verily Allah is going to install you as vicegerents in it to see how you act.”¹⁰ According to this *ḥadīth*, the world is created with a sweet and green environment before sending humans therein, through which Allah tests humans on how they behave with this natural environment. This Prophetic statement implies that if humans badly treat the worldly environment, they must be accountable to Allah for their ill treatment; so, humans should be very cautious and caring while dealing with the natural environment.

Prophet Muḥammad himself led a very simple and modest lifestyle, which had almost zero effect on the natural environment. ‘Ā’ishah said, “He did what one of you would do in his house. He mended sandals and patched garments and sewed.”¹¹ It is reported that “the Prophet used to try to fast on Mondays and Thursdays.”¹² He was satisfied with what he had and used to keep fasting twice a week, in the middle of the month, in the whole month of Ramaḍān, and on different occasions, which clarifies his lifestyle as very simple. The Prophet used to take only a portion of permissible things with restraint and advised his followers to follow this approach while enjoying permissible things. The Prophet said, “Take your rights with restraint, whether it is fulfilled or unfulfilled.”¹³ Even this restraint should be applied in eating for following a healthy life, as he said, “A human being fills no worse vessel than his stomach. It is sufficient for a human being to eat a few mouthfuls to keep his spine straight. But if he must (fill it), then one third for food, one third for drink, and one third for air.”¹⁴

He not only appreciated the simplicity of lifestyle but also made it a part of faith, as he stated, “Verily, simple living is part of faith, simple living is part of faith.”¹⁵ To confirm this simple lifestyle, the Prophet urged Muslims to live like a traveller or a wayfarer in the natural world, not the owner of this world. The Prophet said, “Be in this world as

¹⁰ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2009), *ḥadīth* no. 2742.

¹¹ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad with Full Commentary: A Perfect Code of Manners and Morality*, trans. Adil Salahi (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2018), *ḥadīth* no. 539.

¹² Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2022), *ḥadīth* no. 745.

¹³ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, *ḥadīth* no. 2421.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *ḥadīth* no. 3474.

¹⁵ Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, trans. Yaser Qadhi (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), *ḥadīth* no. 4161.

though you were a traveler.”¹⁶ The sense of a traveller or a wayfarer helps to lead a humble and modest lifestyle, which cannot promote exploiting natural resources but rather advocate sustainable use of the environment. The Prophet strove for the welfare of others and never caused a single harm to others. The gifts he used to receive were often distributed among fellow Muslims, mostly in charity. He taught his followers that contentment of heart did not come from possessing more, but from being satisfied with what one possesses. Muslims must, therefore, seek to simplify their lives and value all they have. The Prophet said, “Whoever among you wakes up physically healthy, feeling safe and secure within him, with food for the day, it is as if he acquired the whole world.”¹⁷ In this way, Prophetic teaching offered a solution for living in simplicity, peace, and harmony, ultimately fostering a happy and sustainable environment for future generations. That’s why the Qur’ān declared, “Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah, you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah often.”¹⁸

Prophet Muḥammad serves as the perfect example of balancing minimalism and moderation. The concept of minimalism has become a recent trend that encourages owning fewer possessions, avoiding excessive materialism, consumerism, and letting go of unnecessary items. It is characterized by several key aspects: intentionality, freedom, reduced stress, lower expenditure, and being counter-cultural. The Prophetic approach to minimalism is deeply rooted in moderation (*wasāṭiyyah*). His simple lifestyle was marked by mindful consumption, frugality, the elimination of inessentials, and moderation. He teaches a balanced lifestyle that aligns with the modern minimalistic movement. Upon thoroughly researching the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad, it becomes abundantly clear that following his practices in day-to-day life may emulate similar effects to those of following minimalism.

However, although the concept of minimalism may share similarities in actions and results with the teachings and practices of the Prophet, they are starkly different when it comes to the motivation behind them. The motivation behind all actions of Prophet Muḥammad was attaining a state of peace by submitting himself to the Will of Allah. He did everything in his life—whether offering prayer (*ṣalāh*), spending

¹⁶ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), ḥadīth no. 6416.

¹⁷ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, ḥadīth no. 4141.

¹⁸ Qur’ān 33:21.

time in seclusion, doing charity, dressing modestly, and performing activities—to get His favour. Furthermore, contrary to minimalism and modern minimalist approaches that often lean towards extremes, Prophetic minimalism advocates for a balanced, moderate path that avoids excess or luxury while still fulfilling essential needs. If a Muslim does not indulge in anything that has been explicitly declared forbidden (*ḥarām*), any wealth or material thing that is acquired by permissible means and done for the pleasure of Allah is encouraged. Islam does not discourage comfortable living or enjoying what life has to offer, be it materialistic or spiritual.

The eating habits of the Prophet were so simple that most of the time, he endured hunger with patience and ate simple food items with gratitude. Anas b. Mālik relates that to the best of his knowledge, the Prophet never took his meals in a big tray, nor did he ever eat well-baked thin bread, nor did he ever eat at a dining table.¹⁹ The Prophet did not like overeating, and he advised staying away from it. Once he said, “Nothing is worse than a person who fills his stomach. It should be enough for the children of Adam to have a few bites.”²⁰

The Prophet used to conserve natural resources as much as possible, even in a ritual performance. He would perform ablution with one *mudd* (half a litre of water) and a ritual bath with one *ṣaʿ* (two litres of water), up to five *mudd* (two and a half litres of water).²¹ The Prophet discouraged the overuse of water in ablution, even though there is plenty of water. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr narrates, “The Messenger of Allah passed by Sa’d when he was performing ablution, and he said, ‘What is this extravagance?’ He said, ‘Can there be any extravagance in ablution?’ He said, ‘Yes, even if you are on the bank of a flowing river.’”²²

Furthermore, he inspired his followers to make sustainable use of the land and to make the land productive. He made a deal with the people of Khaybar on the condition that they would get half of the fruits and vegetation if they could cultivate land.²³ According to the teachings of the Prophet, planting a tree, sowing a seed, and irrigating dry land are all regarded as charitable deeds.²⁴ The Prophet’s *sunnah* and traditions closely align with the standards for leading an environmentally friendly life; his

¹⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 298.

²⁰ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, ḥadīth no. 3349.

²¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 198; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 325.

²² Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, ḥadīth no. 425.

²³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 524.

²⁴ Ibid., ḥadīth no. 41.

teachings remind us about mindful consumption and provide practical and comprehensive solutions to the many current environmental problems.

Prophet Muḥammad declares tree plantation as a renewable source of charity, as he said, “There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift.”²⁵ We can see how every beneficial deed is rewarded by Allah. To the naked eye, they may be seen as one act of planting trees, but this brings numerous benefits in the long run. In another *ḥadīth*, the Prophet takes a strong position for the protection of trees, “If anyone cuts the lote-tree (uselessly and unjustly that gives shade and shelter for humans and beasts), Allah will bring him into hell headlong.”²⁶ The Prophet also emphasized planting even if doomsday reaches, “If the resurrection were established upon one of you while he has in his hand a sapling, then let him plant it.”²⁷ In this way, he recognized the importance of trees in sustaining life. This Prophetic advice underscores the ecological benefits of afforestation and reforestation, crucial in combating climate change and maintaining biodiversity.

Prophet Muḥammad established the *ḥimā* of al-Naqī' to the south of Medina to protect wild animals, plants, and trees. In the declared *ḥimā* area, hunting was forbidden, and the destruction of plants and trees was prohibited. At the same time, Medina state initiated a protected area that allowed for feeding the livestock of the poor and the state cavalry, with maintenance of its resilience and sustainability. To keep this zone untouched and sustained, any type of man-made construction was not permitted.²⁸ Similarly, the Prophet created a protected zone called “*ḥaram*” near Medina to protect natural reservoirs of water for non-human and non-animal species with sufficient water for them. The *ḥaram* areas were formed around wells and water sources to keep those water resources untouched by humans, but nearby wild plants and animals could consume water from there according to their necessity.²⁹ Thus, water resources, wild plants, and wild animals were protected with the initiatives of *ḥimā* and *ḥaram* by the Prophet.

²⁵ Ibid., *ḥadīth* no. 2320.

²⁶ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *ḥadīth* no. 5239.

²⁷ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2012), *ḥadīth* no. 12902.

²⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥadīth* no. 2370; Also see, Gari Lutfallah, “Ecology in Muslim Heritage: A History of the Hima Conservation System,” *Muslim Heritage* 12, no. 2 (2006): 213-28.

²⁹ Ahmad Garba, “Environmental Protection in the light of Prophetic Traditions,” *Civilization Research: Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2025): 295-310.

The Prophet treated animals with deep love, reverence, and humility. In the time of travels and conflicts, he used to consider camels and horses brave allies, and their presence gave him solace and wisdom. Many traditions, stories, and admonitions showed a very close relationship between the Prophet and animals. Although he did not practice vegetarianism, his sympathy, gentleness, and sensitivity to non-human animals seem very strong.

The consequence of mistreating animals is very bad. Ill-treatment of animals can lead one to hell, as the Prophet said, “A woman was tortured and was put into hell because of a cat which she had locked, and it died of hunger. Allah said (to the woman), ‘You neither fed it nor watered it when you locked it up, nor did you set it free to eat the insects of the earth.’”³⁰ According to this Prophetic tradition, torturing animals becomes a barrier to getting final salvation. Allah-loving and final salvation-seeking humans cannot mistreat the creatures of Allah. Another Prophetic tradition shows how a man got the mercy of Allah by serving a dog. The Prophet said, “While a man was walking, he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, ‘The dog is suffering from the same problem as of mine.’ So, he went down the well, filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth, and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah appreciated this (good) deed and forgave him.” After hearing this event, his companions asked, “O Allah’s Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?” The Prophet replied, “Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate (living being).”³¹ This Prophetic tradition teaches that, by offering services to animals, one can have Allah’s pleasure. If anyone unnecessarily harms any animal, Allah will question him for harming it.³² Humans should have such a feeling or realization that, without justification, no animal should be killed. Keeping the Prophetic guidelines regarding animal treatment in mind, humans, as being Allah’s representatives on earth (*khulafāʾ*), should be service givers to the creatures of Allah, rather than being only service takers from the environment. Allah’s mercy depends on showing mercy to the creatures, as the Prophet stated, “Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you.”³³

³⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 553.

³¹ Ibid., ḥadīth no. 5663; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 2244.

³² Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, trans. James Robson (Lahore: S. M. Ashraf, 1960), ḥadīth no. 4094.

³³ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, ḥadīth no. 1924.

To keep sustainable use of the resources, the Prophet discouraged overconsumption or a luxurious lifestyle, as he said, “Beware of luxury, for the servants of Allah do not live luxuriously.”³⁴ Overconsumption or a luxurious lifestyle means wasting resources, which Allah dislikes, as the Prophet said, “Verily, Allah dislikes for you three things: gossiping, asking too many questions, and wasting wealth.”³⁵ Leading a luxurious life or overconsumption is criticized as a worse deed by the Prophet by saying this: “There will be men from my nation who eat a variety of foods, drink a variety of drinks, wear a variety of clothes, and are boastful in their speech. These are the worst of my nation.”³⁶ No Muslim should be the worst one by doing what the Prophet dislikes, but rather they should do what is appreciated and suggested by the Prophet. As a moderate approach in words and deeds is recommended by the Prophet, Muslims should follow that in their lifestyle. The Prophet said, “Always adopt a middle, moderate, regular course whereby you reach your target.”³⁷ He also said, “Do good deeds properly, sincerely, and moderately.”³⁸ All these Prophetic traditions condemn overconsumption and encourage using natural resources moderately to sustain the environment.

Though humans are given a very special status and dignity on the earth to meet their basic needs from the earth’s resources, they are not given a monopoly on using them. When their basic needs are met, humans should not prevent other creatures from meeting their needs from the earth’s resources. The Prophet said, “Do not withhold the superfluous water, for that will prevent people from grazing their cattle.”³⁹ So, showing respect to the Prophet, Muslims should share the earth’s resources with all other creatures.

Humans are not the owners of earth, but rather they are guests on it. The planet Earth is created purified and a place of worship to Allah, as the Prophet said, “The earth has been made for me purifying and as a mosque (place for prayer).”⁴⁰ When Muslims do not find a mosque, they can perform their prayers in any place on earth, because generally, the earth is a purified place to worship Allah according to the said *ḥadīth*. When water is insufficient, Muslims are allowed to perform *tayammum* (dry *wuḍūʾ*) by using dust or clay, as the Prophet said, “Perform

³⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ḥadīth no. 22105.

³⁵ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 1715.

³⁶ Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr* (Beirut: DKI, 2007), ḥadīth no. 7512.

³⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 6463.

³⁸ Ibid., ḥadīth no. 6464.

³⁹ Ibid., ḥadīth no. 2353.

⁴⁰ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ḥadīth no. 489.

tayammum with clean earth and that will be sufficient for you.”⁴¹ All these Prophetic traditions indicate that the planet Earth is sacred (not divine), so Muslims should behave with the earth and all its substances gently; otherwise, they will be accountable to Allah.

Allah has sent Prophet Muḥammad as a mercy for all creatures,⁴² as the Prophet said, “I have been sent to all creatures for their betterment.”⁴³ Animals could complain to him about the mistreatment of their owners, and the Prophet could understand their sufferings. One day, the Prophet entered a garden, and a camel complained to him, weeping against her owner. Then the Prophet asked her owner, “Do you not fear Allah regarding this animal? Verily, she has complained to me that you keep her hungry and tired.”⁴⁴ All these *ḥadīths* teach us that the sufferings and pleasures of all creatures should matter to Muslims if they really want to follow the legacy of the Prophet.

Muslims cannot be selfish, but rather they should follow an altruistic approach. The way they think of their own benefits, they should also think of the benefits of others. The Prophet said, “A man is not a believer who fills his stomach while his neighbour is hungry.”⁴⁵ The word “neighbour” in this *ḥadīth* not only includes surrounding humans but also includes surrounding creatures. The *ḥadīth* teaches that no animal should be in danger due to human activities.

According to Prophetic traditions, cleanliness includes an individual’s body, mind, and surrounding environment. Prophet Muḥammad considered it half of faith.⁴⁶ He discussed both internal and external purification of the body, as well as purifying one’s surroundings. We can prevent environmental pollution by cleaning up. Islamic faith and practices cannot be perfect without cleanliness. To keep the road clean and secure, removing garbage from a footpath is considered a cause of forgiveness, as the Prophet said, “While a man walks along a path, he finds a thorny branch of a tree on the way and removes it. Allah thanks him for that deed and forgives him.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, keeping the public sphere unhygienic and dirty is considered a cursed deed, as the Prophet said, “Beware of the three acts

⁴¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 348.

⁴² Qur’ān 21:107.

⁴³ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’*, ḥadīth no. 1553.

⁴⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ḥadīth no. 2549.

⁴⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, ḥadīth no. 112.

⁴⁶ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 223.

⁴⁷ Ibid., *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 1914.

that cause you to be cursed: relieving yourselves in shaded places (that people utilize), in a walkway, or in a watering place.”⁴⁸ Muslims should keep public spheres clean and secure according to the said *ḥadīths*.

Present Ecological Crisis in Dhaka City

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is one of the most important economic, cultural, and scientific hubs of South Asia. But one of the most difficult issues of Dhaka city is widespread ecological ill-treatment.⁴⁹ The natural environment of the city gets worse day by day due to the depletion of natural resources, pollution of water, air, and land, overpopulation, etc.⁵⁰ The main ecological problems of the city are as follows:

The six rivers around the city—the Buriganga, Sitalakhya, Bangshi, Turag, Balu, and Dhaleshawri—are now biologically dead, according to a study by the Environment and Social Development Organization.⁵¹ The water of these rivers is polluted by industrial waste, medical garbage, and household waste. Therefore, the water of these rivers is completely unfit for washing and aquatic life.

In Dhaka city, air pollution has reached an unacceptable level. According to the Department of the Environment,⁵² sometimes the air pollution of the city supersedes the minimum standard of air quality stated in the Air Quality Index (AQI). The air of the city is polluted by industrial emissions, heavy traffic volume and congestion, and uncontrolled emissions from motor vehicle engines. The city has now turned into a poisonous gas chamber.⁵³

Deforestation is one of the main ecological crises of Dhaka city. The Government of Bangladesh and the concerned authorities often give

⁴⁸ This *ḥadīth* is *ḥasan* as ranked by al-Albānī. For details, see Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silālat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1980).

⁴⁹ Mohammad Anisur Rahaman, Abul Kalam, and Md. Al-Mamun, “Unplanned Urbanization and Health Risks of Dhaka City in Bangladesh: Uncovering the Associations between Urban Environment and Public Health,” *Frontiers in Public Health* 11 (2023): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1269362>.

⁵⁰ See Md. Abu Sayem, “Causes and Consequences of Environmental Degradation: A Survey Study,” *International Journal for the Asian Philosophical Association* 13, no. 2 (2021): 45-67.

⁵¹ S. M. Najmus Sakib, “Random Waste Dumping, Unclean Environs Redouble Dengue,” *The Financial Express*, September 19, 2022, <https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/print/random-waste-dumping-unclean-environs-redouble-dengue-1663522116>.

⁵² *Bangladesh Environment and Climate Change Outlook 2012* (Dhaka: Department of Environment (DoE), Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2012).

⁵³ Abu Sayem, “Islamic Teaching and Practice,” 10; Also see Abu Sayem, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (London: Routledge, 2023); Sayem, “Islam and Environmental Ethics,” 157-72.

priority to the development projects over environmental concerns.⁵⁴ Both of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) compete in taking different projects for different infrastructures like flyovers, highway expresses, metro rails, roads, footpaths, etc., at the cost of ecological sustainability, because of which some existing trees inside the city are indiscriminately being cut down and some of vacant areas are labelled for making new flyovers and roads in the city.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, both city corporations could not take any significant initiative to increase the city's greenery by saving and planting more trees inside the city.⁵⁶

In earlier days, some areas of Dhaka, like Mirpur, Dhanmondi, Muhammadpur, Bonani, etc., were covered with natural vegetation. Now, most of the areas of the city are empty of natural vegetation due to industrial and commercial establishments and the construction of roads and highways. The city looks like a jungle of buildings, slums, apartments, and squatters, which lacks greenery. In the city, there is no required number of parks, open spaces, and playing fields for its inhabitants. For example, Azimpur Park, Tikatuli Park, Armanitola Playing Field, and Anwara Udyan have almost disappeared.

The main source of noise pollution in the city is the fossil fuel-driven motor vehicles. Alongside, both industrialization and urbanization pollute the noise. The city dwellers are severely affected by the indiscriminate honking of different vehicles. According to the World Health Organization, a healthy environment should be below 60 BD. But according to the report of the Department of Environment,⁵⁷ the city has already crossed the level. The people of the city are now facing serious health risks like headache, indigestion, high blood pressure, deafness, peptic ulcer, etc.

Dhaka city lacks a proper waste management system. Its poor management system cannot efficiently manage the huge amount of

⁵⁴ Abu Sayem, "Islamic Teaching and Practice," 1-18; Abu Sayem, "Eco-Religious Teachings and Environmental Sustainability: An Analysis of Workability of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's 'Eco-Spirituality' in the Context of Bangladesh," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 3 (2021): 69-83, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v6i3.357>; Abu Sayem, "Evaluation of John B. Cobb, Jr.'s Ecological Model, with the Focus on Its Workability in the Context of Bangladesh," *Studia Ecologiae Et Bioethicae* 21, no. 2 (2023): 15-25, <https://doi.org/10.21697/seb.2023.16>.

⁵⁵ S. M. Najmus Sakib, "Weak waste management leaves Dhaka communities at risk from landfill sites," *Mongabay*, September 2, 2022.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Bangladesh Environment and Climate Change Outlook 2012*.

garbage produced by domestic, industrial, commercial, and clinical use.⁵⁸ Therefore, it leads to severe soil, water, and air pollution within and the surrounding areas of the city.

The night sky of Dhaka city has been visibly infested by non-essential lighting, like the billboard luminaries, decorative flood lighting, and big screen advertisements. The light pollution of the city prevents birds and other non-human animals from living therein and disturbs plants' growth and trees' sustainability.

Dhaka is the eighth most populated city in the world that has more than 10.2 million people. It is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, where 47,400 people live per square kilometre.⁵⁹ According to the Ecological Treat Report,⁶⁰ it is one of the most unsustainable megacities in the world. This overpopulation indicates over-exploitation of natural resources. So, with an overpopulation size, Dhaka experiences the worst vulnerability to ecological threats.

In the old part of the city, there are some industries, for example, tanneries, while in the modern part, there are some unplanned commercial sites like ready-made garment factories, shopping malls, clinics, and hospitals. All these industrial and commercial sites do not have advanced disposal systems.⁶¹ The city corporation's poor waste management system cannot properly handle the discriminated waste and garbage.⁶² As a result, there is a hazardous and unhygienic environment almost everywhere in the city.

The city was developed in an unplanned way and is flourishing, violating the due urbanization process. Most constructions in the city do not follow a proper system. The rapid growth of the city with new constructions vehemently ignores the minimum level of ecological essentiality for the city dwellers and other non-human and non-animal species.

⁵⁸ Sakib, "Weak waste management."

⁵⁹ Tribune Desk, "Dhaka remains the world's most densely populated city," *Dhaka Tribune*, October 14, 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/158221/dhaka-remains-the-world%E2%80%99s-most-densely-populated>.

⁶⁰ "Dhaka in List of 20 Most Unsustainable Megacities," *The Daily Star*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/environment/news/dhaka-list-20-most-unsustainable-megacities-3146661>.

⁶¹ Sakib, "Weak waste management."

⁶² Ibid.

Prophet Muḥammad's Ecological Teachings vis-à-vis the Environmental Sustainability of Dhaka City

Dhaka city is severely polluted by its residents. The city has lost its natural scenic beauty and has become a barren land that lacks greenery. Although most inhabitants of the city are followers of Islam, there is a serious lack among them of the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad.

Seemingly, the causes of the city's present ecological crisis include blind imitation of Western culture, negligence, and ignorance of Prophetic ecological teachings and practices. The city's residents have transformed Islamic religiosity into a cultural identity. If they had been aware and conscious of the Prophet's ecological guidelines, they would not have polluted their city.

For Muslims, Prophet Muḥammad should be the best role model for every aspect of their lives. The holistic and comprehensive ecological teachings and practices of the Prophet provide basic guidelines on how we should behave towards nature. He compared the earth to a mother and advised us to safeguard it.⁶³ If one ponders the Prophetic traditions, they can understand why the ecological teachings of Prophet Muḥammad are still relevant to the present environment and how these can play a decisive role in addressing the current ecological crisis in the city. The ecological degradation of the city can be reduced by following the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad.

One of the leading causes of the ecological crisis of Dhaka city is our consumeristic lifestyle choices. There is an urgent need to bring about a significant change in the lifestyle of the residents of the city. Here, Prophet Muḥammad can be the best role model for sustainable living.

During his lifetime, the Prophet himself used to practice a very simple but sustainable lifestyle that can be recommended to Muslims for sustainable living. The Prophet used to do his household affairs by himself. He used to mend sandals, patch garments, and sew clothes.⁶⁴ His simple lifestyle is a glaring example of moderation, compassion, and kindness, where there was no place for extravagance, wastefulness, corruption, injustice, and inequality. As his *ummah*, or to be a true Muslim, the inhabitants of Dhaka city should follow his instructions. If the city inhabitants sincerely and truly follow the green attitudes,

⁶³ Kori Majeed and Sarah Yasmin Latif, *Forty Green Hadith Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad on Environmental Justice and Sustainability* (Cambridge: Cambridge Central Mosque, 2020).

⁶⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, ḥadīth no. 539.

behaviour, and lifestyle of the Prophet, they can easily be convinced to practice 3Rs—Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle—to reduce the acute environmental pollution of their city.

By following the Prophet's simple lifestyle and his policy of moderation, Muslim inhabitants of the city should avoid an over-consumption mentality to conserve the existing natural resources of the city. At the same time, they can have a strong sense of accountability to God and belongingness to the natural system of Dhaka city, which can promote their self-realization of natural resources. The scarcity of natural resources in the city can be properly utilized by the Prophetic teaching of "showing mercy to others" and an accountable use of natural resources.

Since Dhaka serves its inhabitants with its limited natural resources, city dwellers should respect the city like mothers by following the Prophetic reverence for the soil. By keeping this in mind, if the city dwellers can take a simple lifestyle of being self-satisfied with what they rightly possess in terms of the limited natural resources of the land, it may be possible to sustain the rest of the city's land with responsible utilization. Prophet Muḥammad regarded the earth as a place of prayer and purification.⁶⁵ That's why Muslims are allowed to perform the ritual of *tayammum*, which permits the use of dust in the ritual purification before prayer when water is not available. He created *ḥimā* and *ḥaram* zones to protect land, forest, and wildlife.

The Prophet taught the principles of saving and safeguarding the purity of water. He was very careful in utilizing a minimal amount of water. His practices of moderation inspire us to perform ritual purifications for worship like ablution (*wuḍū'*) and bath (*ghusl*). The Prophet used to perform ablution with half a litre of water and perform a ritual bath with two litres of water, up to two and a half litres of water.⁶⁶ He created a protected zone called *ḥaram* near Medina for preserving water and the local ecosystems. Since Dhaka city has a scarcity of pure water, and all surrounding rivers are dead due to extreme environmental pollution, the city authority can take the Prophet's paradigm for a protected zone of water conservation.

The inhabitants of Dhaka city should be mindful and conscious about their actions and should not do anything that will leave the environment dirty and unhygienic. They should keep their environment clean from home to state. By getting inspiration from the Prophetic teaching, the city dwellers should discard what is dirty and harmful and

⁶⁵ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ḥadīth no. 99.

⁶⁶ Majeed and Latif, *Forty Green Hadith Sayings*.

maintain the cleanliness of the city. According to a *ḥadīth*, if a person removes harmful things from roads or footpaths to keep the streets safe and clean, this is considered an act of charity.⁶⁷ The followers of Islam are advised not to relieve urine and stools in watering places, roads, and shaded areas, because these actions disrupt others by keeping the surrounding environment unclean.

Prophet Muḥammad was inspired to plant trees and advised to plant a tree even if doomsday is imminent.⁶⁸ He popularized the concept of *ḥimā* (a protected area), which is applied for the protection of wildlife and forestry. This idea is now widely used and should be applied to make Dhaka city greener. It is believed that he established a protected zone in the south of the Medina, where it was illegal to cut down trees and plants within a twelve-mile radius. In some areas of *ḥimā*, hunting was also prohibited for certain times.⁶⁹

Following the Prophet's example, the Department of Environment, with the help of the Islamic Foundation, should make wildlife sanctuaries in Dhaka city, where no one will be allowed to cut trees or hunt birds and other animals. The Government of Bangladesh should declare those areas as protected zones for wildlife. With the Government of Bangladesh, the DNCC and DSCC should not make any other highways, flyovers, housing societies, or pathways by cutting existing trees along the city streets.

Another important question related to the environment is the proper treatment of non-human animals. It is very unfortunate in the case of Dhaka city that some animal species are becoming extinct, and some other animals are straying—abandoned and hungry—on different streets of the city. The residents of the city do not treat non-human animals well in the way they should treat them. The insensitiveness and intolerance towards them remain among the city's dwellers due to the unawareness of the teachings of Islam. Prophet Muḥammad was careful while dealing with the non-human animals. Many Prophetic traditions show that humans will be answerable to God for their actions and attitudes towards non-human animals.

Conclusion

In this study, we made a humble effort to explore the ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad and show how these eco-religious guidelines can play a significant role in reducing the present ecological

⁶⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 1914.

⁶⁸ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ḥadīth no. 12491.

⁶⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 2370; Also see, Lutfallah, "Ecology in Muslim Heritage," 213-28; Garba, "Environmental Protection in the Light of Prophetic Traditions," 295-310.

crisis of Dhaka city. In a time when humanity is in a large ecological crisis and human activities are damaging the environment rather than protecting it, the Prophetic eco-religious foundations offer theoretical and practical support for ecological sustainability. Prophet Muḥammad was the pioneer in emphasizing ecological sustainability. He had a deeper concern for the environment and showed his efforts for conservation of the natural resources, the prohibition of waste, and mercy to animals. All his teachings and practices inspire humans to make balance and harmony with the rest of the creation, and they highly prefer sustainability over luxury and corruption.

The Government of Bangladesh and the Department of Environment should take some initiatives for ecological sustainability in Dhaka city. For example, Islamic environmental ethics that are commanded by the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* need to be included in the educational curriculum from primary to university level. In Bangladesh, ecological sustainability is generally seen from a secular (scientific) perspective. But this kind of attitude brought very few effective results that can benefit the environment of Dhaka city. Now the time has come to see the environment from a religious perspective. There are many Islamic educational institutions and mosques in Dhaka city. The imams of the mosques can make people conscious of the environment through their sermons. Collaborating with the mainstream educational institutes, Islamic institutions may contribute to growing people's consciousness regarding the inseparable relationship with the natural world. Media can also play a pivotal role in spreading the message of the Prophetic ecological teachings and practices. Documentaries, dramas, advertisements, etc., should be made in a way that will specially highlight the Prophetic ecological teachings and practices, and they need to be shared on social media such as Facebook, X, Instagram, etc.

Dhaka city is facing unfathomable environmental degradation. Being far away from the Prophetic ecological teachings, many inhabitants of the city blindly follow the materialistic and mechanistic worldviews and imitate a culture that promotes the view that nature has no purpose, significance, or value. Unawareness and negligence of the Prophetic ecological teachings and practices seem to be a strong reason behind the ecological crisis of the city. Muslims cannot be indifferent to the Prophetic guidelines. If they follow the comprehensive ecological teachings and practices of Prophet Muḥammad and love their dwelling place as their mother, they cannot cause harm to the natural resources and pollute the air, water, soil, etc., by their selfish and uncontrolled actions; but rather they should be moderate and be satisfied with what they have. We do believe that, having followed the above Prophetic

ecological teachings and practices, the residents of Dhaka city can bring a positive change in their attitudes and behaviours while addressing the limited natural resources of the city.

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