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Authors & Affiliations	1. Dr. Sumaira Nawaz Assistant Professor Assistant Professor, Department of Basic Sciences & Humanities, University of Engineering & Technology Taxila. { sumaira.nawaz@uettaxila.edu.pk }			
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Environmental Challenges of Present world and its Sustainable Solutions in the light of Seerah

Dr. Sumaira Nawaz*

Assistant Professor, Department of Basic Sciences & Humanities, University of Engineering & Technology Taxila.

Abstract

Environment is one of the concerning issues not only for human being but for each organism that is being discussed today on global level. The circumstances, objects or conditions by which one is surrounded, is an environment. All components of environment either living or non living try to adjust to the environment in which they are living. When any unfavourable change occurs in an environment it is known as environmental degradation. The pollution of the soil, deforestation, contamination of water, air pollution, and the extinction of some species is the phenomena known as environmental challenges and now becoming a global issue and threat for the whole humanity. Actually, Modern man of today's world has achieved a lot in the form of betterment but is facing severe aggression of environmental crises or challenges. Though the entire world is not free from this danger and its hazards, this problem is more acute in the third world countries by facing twofold crises; crises of development (by Poverty) and crises of environment due to global Change, lack of resources, exploitation of resources and energy supplies. The pursuit of sustainable solutions of these environmental issues has been focus of UN since its inception. In 1972, such issues were highlighted by the world body of UN at Stockholm Sweden for a sustainable solution. The world body also set up their plan for the sustainable development within a peaceful environment to Millennium Development Goal (MDG). This target cannot be achieved while having environmental challenges because sustainable development is not confined to economic growth but it is also ecological sustainability which results in improving the living standards of individual and communities. But still we have not been able to find a sustainable solution to the environmental crises despite of all the modern and technological advancements. A conscious effort for the preservation of nature and natural environment is essential to deal with this problem of enormous magnitude.

One way to tackle this problem is to follow the ethical bonds and limitations imposed by religion about environmental

protection. Major world religions have some ethical perspective regarding environment and nature traditionally. Unfortunately such type of concern for environment is decreasing in modern society due to greed and materialistic approach. In Islam man and nature are found in a state of unity and harmony, where to plant a tree, to feed and respect an animal, to sustain purity of the water and to remove the hinder from the way, are among the best actions of worship. However, the sustainable development policies can be made environmental friendly by following the Prophetic teachings and by adhering to the ethical responsibilities. In this article, it is purposed how to facilitate environmental friendly conduct through practice of Seerah. This methodological procedure will support environmental friendly behaviours in practice. Subsequently in this context, Prophetic guidance about preventive measures as the solution of environmental challenges is elaborated and discussed in detail.

Key Words: Environment, Environmental Challenges, Prophetic Guidance, Sustainable solutions etc

Introduction

The components of Environment are treated in the field of biosphere while aquatic element of earth is mostly discussed in ecosystem. Similarly, the pollution of environment and its conservation generally elaborated in 'Conservation of Natural Resources'.¹ Some human activities that may cause directly or indirect damage to the natural environment are known as anthropogenic impact on Environment. For instance, environmental degradation, global warming, water acidification, bio diversity loss, ecological crises and collapse etc.² The carbon dioxide released by smoke in the air through automobiles and industrial chimneys and transportation results in increased health disease(i.e. asthma, respiratory problems and number of allergies etc) for all organisms in the environment.

Current Environmental Challenges of the World:

Air Pollution

Due to inefficient use of energy, open burning solid and inadequate activities of industries, air is continuously getting polluted and has now become among the one of serious environmental problems and is known as air pollution³. Infect various particulates and chemicals pollute our air after release into the atmosphere. Common gases that may pollute air are carbon monoxide, Sulfur (SO₂) dioxide, Chloro fluo

ro Carbons (CFC) and nitrogen oxide, mostly produced by industries and motor vehicles. Such types of pollutants⁴ are result of the following human activities, e.g.

- Sulphur oxide (SO₂) that is result of industrial process.
- Nitrogen oxide (NO_x) is formed by high temperature.

- Carbon monoxide (Co) is a poisonous gas that is produced by incomplete combustion of fuel.
- Carbon dioxide (co2) a colourless, non-toxic greenhouse gas, emitted by cement production.

According to the 'Pakistan National Conservation Strategy Report 2013', the average Pakistani vehicle is emitting the above mentioned poisonous gases much greater than the average vehicles of the developed countries i.e USA.

The responsible factors which may cause pollution into atmosphere are classified into two types;

First is natural while the second is Anthropogenic. Naturally, Dust in large areas of land without vegetation's, methane, emitted by the excretes of animals and radon gas from radioactive decay within the earth crust are the common sources of pollution into environment.

Similarly, anthropogenic sources (mostly related to burning different types of fuel) and waste desposition also produce methane⁵ gas which is one of major source of air pollution.

Hence due to excessive industrial exhausts of Sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide, the sky of Pakistani cities is covered with thick smog, which may result in many respiratory diseases as well as harm to animals residing in that area. Even in Islamabad, the cleanest city of Pakistan the sky is full of thick smog from Margallah hills and while travelling to Murree we have to close our car windows due to the fumes of vehicles.

Land Pollution

Poor waste disposal, augmented mechanization and excessive use of chemical fertilizer may cause land pollution. Land pollution can be defined as the deposition of waste in the form of solid or liquid by human activities that may affect the biophysical environment as well as endanger human health.⁶ Some major pollutants are underground storage tanks due to corrosion of their piping, coal ash that is disposed, pesticides, oil and fuel that is dumped, industrial wastes discharged to the soil and domestic waste etc.

Being a developing country, Pakistan has not enough resources to develop a full-fledged waste disposal system. Usually most of the waste material is burnt which has harmful impact on human beings. 5% of the waste material is being recycled while 95% is thrown away on land directly. Due to limited garbage cans installation, and lack of proper cleanliness awareness program man and environment both are at risk. Apparently it does not have any harmful effects but in a long run poisonous materials can reach underground water system which is a source of fresh water and drinking water which can result in health hazards.

Water Pollution

Water pollution is now becoming a major Global problem which is another example of human unfriendly behaviour and its impact on

environment. It refers to the release of some pollutant into water bodies like rivers, lakes, aquifers etc without any filtration treatment.

The most common pollutants of water are; wide spectrum of chemicals, pathogens, and physical or sensory changes such as elevated temperature and discoloration. Since some chemicals and substances are natural, therefore it is important to understand the difference between the natural components of water and the contaminants (pollutants). Alteration in water's physical chemistry includes acidity (change in PH), electrical conductivity, temperature and eutrophication.

Some other pollutants are; detergents, food processing waste including fats and grease(oxygen demanding substances), petroleum hydrocarbons including fuels(gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel and fuel oil)and lubricants(motor oil) and tree and bush debris from logging operations.

Thermal pollution is another issue related with water pollution that is raise or fall in the temperature of natural body of water caused by human influence. Actually, it occurs when there is a change in physical properties of water such as use of water as coolant by power plants and industrial manufacturers. Since elevated water temperature decreases oxygen level it can kill marine life as and can effect ecosystem.

In Pakistan, water pollution is an emerging problem in all cities, as many industries are dumping contaminated water in seas that may cause the extinction of marine life. Moreover the city's sewerage is dumped into rivers and the sea which has resulted in deficiency of clean water in most of its cities.

The oil spill incidents have increased pollution not only in sea but at beaches as well. It is said that the oil spill disaster from Tasman spirit has killed hundreds and thousands of fishes as well as destroyed much of marine life. It has also resulted in eye infections and respiratory problem for nearly habitants. Furthermore, leakage in pipelines is another serious issue faced in Pakistan that pollutes the clean water.

Rapid growth of urbanization, increased industrial activities, dependence of agricultural Sector on chemical and fertilizer are the major causes of deterioration in water quality and contamination of lakes, rivers and ground water aquifers.⁸

Noise Pollution

The displeasing or excessive noise results in the disorder and disturbs all the activities and compromises the imbalance of the human or animal life. Noise is one of the most dangerous environmental pollution than manmade toxins.

The major pollutants of outdoor noise world widely are; machines and transportation system, motor vehicles, aircraft, and trains. Moreover poor urban planning is one of the causes for noise pollution due to side by side residential or industrial buildings.⁹

Deforestation

One of the most serious transgressions of man in environment is cutting down of forests due to many reasons. Besides some economic motives (sold for fuel or as timber) farmer also cut forests for getting more place for cultivation of crops, pasture of livestock, plantation of commodities and settlement. Along with the corruption of government institutions, over population and urbanization are also among some root causes for deforestation.¹⁰

Our dry land regions occupy about 40% of earth whereas we are continuously increasing this ratio by converting parks, gardens, forest in to desert places. For instance, 95% of the Lake Chad, Nigeria has lost into desertification and has been shrunk. Moreover 70% of species live in forest while in the result of deforestation we lose millions of precious species (animals and plants) that beautify our environment).

Another dangerous impact of cutting trees without reforestation is the tremendous raise of temperature since forests are providing natural canopy that blocks the ultra violet rays from sun in daytime. Further it also effects bio sequestration of atmospheric carbon dioxide and over population and urbanization are some of the root causes for deforestation.¹¹

Ozone Depletion

The ozone layer is a belt of naturally occurring ozone gas that sits 9.3 to 18.6 miles (15 to 30 kilometres) above to earth and serves as a shield from the harmful ultraviolet B radiation emitted by the sun. Ozone is a highly reactive molecule that contains three oxygen atoms. It is constantly being formed and broken down in the high atmosphere, 6.2 to 31 miles (10 to 50 kilometres) above the earth in the region called the stratosphere.

Due to halocarbon refrigerants, the Ozone envelop around the earth is depleting in volume since 1980s. Actually Halocarbons (being lighter than other gases in the atmosphere) rise much higher in the atmosphere. They then photo dissociate to give atomic halogens. These adons catalyze the destruction of the Ozone gas. Such depletion of ozone may endanger human life as well as other species in the environment. Since Ozone layer protects us from UV rays of the sun, its deficiency may cause most of the skin diseases, including skin cancer etc.

Climate Change and Global Warming

There is a world consensus that climate change is increasing day by day largely by human activities. Climate change has a significant and lasting change in the statistical distribution of weather patterns over period ranging from decades to million years. It is a change in average weather conditions, the major factors that may cause for climate change are oceanic processes, variations in solar radiation received by earth, plate tectonics and volcanic eruption, and human- induced alterations of natural world; and also cause for global warming.¹²

The 'International Panel on Climate Change' (IPCC) has predicted in the year 2007 that sea level will rise from seven to twenty three inches by the year 2100 due to global warming. Similarly over populated coastal communities and infrastructure would be affected by flooding some buildings or vulnering to storm damage. Similarly the shoreline would be changed on land. There would be flood in some areas and drought in some other areas.¹³

The temperature of earth is increasing that may affect living organism and it is a serious situation. The glaciers are melting and level of oceans is increasing which is called global warming. Evidence of climate change includes the instrumental temperature record rising sea levels and decreased snow cover in the northern Hemispheres. According to the 'Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change' (IPCC), most of the observed increase in global average temperature since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increased in human greenhouse concentrations.

The greenhouse effect is a natural process that they sustain the liveable temperature of earth. Energy from the sun warms the earth when its heat rays are absorbed by the atmosphere. Pakistan is a very small contributor in greenhouse effect; Pakistan contributes only 0.2% greenhouse gases of the whole world.

Domination of Science and Technology over Nature

Man progresses through science and technology but losses many human values and concept of nature at the same time. Some values of self-evident have developed from the scientific revolution.¹⁴ Infect science and technology has questioned and changed the ethical values of middle age adopted by Muslim society. Nowadays natural senses examine human physiography, their intellectual level and behaviours. In Schuon's words in fact man is creator and creature at the same time. Man's creation is dependent to science that eventually makes an attack on divinity and nature.¹⁵

The science of nature in spite of having little benefits is becoming the main factor for man's encounter with nature due to its secularized approach. That urges man to accept the full dominant power to science and technology by removing the God's vision in the whole knowledge and scheme of nature. Even J. Sittar in his writing "The Ecology of Faith" has clearly said that the world view of religion as described by 'Bible' is quite different from the view created and nurtured by American people's experiences.¹⁶In fact such domination of science and technology is the main cause of so many environmental crises facing by the people due to excess use of iron, fire and invisible forces by machines.

The dominating behaviours of human over nature result in following problems;

- The deficiency of breathing space
- The mobbing of urban life

- The problem of over population
- The exhaustion of natural resources
- The destruction of the aesthetic elements of our environment
- The unusual rise in psychological diseases etc.

Adequate Solutions of Environmental Crises in the light of Seerah

Islam is introduced as al dīn al Fiṭrah that refers to a natural religion being most suitable for human temperament. Nature and the whole cosmos along with men and women are the subject matter of the Islam. It never differentiates between man and nature, natural and super natural but it urges and motivates man to conquer the world of nature as a religious duty. Many Muslim Scholars, who are the expert of Qurān elaborated over the cosmic dimensions by referring the phenomena of nature as ayatullah. The Islamic view point regarding nature and natural environment is totally in contrast to western secular approach regarding environment. Islam always attaches to environment and its constituents, even nature's description in Qurānic revelation and the natural forms as well as human being are taken as witness of Allah (Ayt ullah). Hussain Naṣr by negating the western approach of refusal to see God as real Environment strongly admits Allah as an ultimate environment by encompassing all nature and human being. Similarly man gets the role of khalīfah in these phenomena.¹⁷ However, the modern environmental crises may cause the refusal of God as an environment as well as man not as vicegerent of God. So that the environment is not being considered as more respectable and care able while man also does not fulfils his responsibilities of caring about it. As a result the situation of environment is retaliating day by day.

While ḥadīth and Seerah being the explicit part of Qurān, also elaborates the same view point about environment microscopically as well as simply. However, such methodological approach of Seerah has not been elaborated sufficiently by Muslim environmentalists in the scenario of environmental crises and their solutions.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), being the advocate of the religion of humanity, has major concern about protection of environment as well as nature. He always focused on humanism that urges all Muslims to have quality of well being for all the living beings. Jarīr b. 'Adullah reported that Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said;

" يَا بَعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى إِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَائِي الزَّكَاةَ وَالنُّصْحَ لِكُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ " ¹⁸

"I gave the pledge of allegiance to Allah's Apostle (صلى الله عليه وسلم) for to offer prayers perfectly, to pay Zakat regularly, and be well wisher to every Muslim."

The word (Al Nuṣḥi) النُّصْح means well wishing. It is also derived from "Naṣḥat ul 'sl" that means to purify the honey. Similarly 'Naṣḥat al Shai' means to clean or purify something. According to Imām Al Khitābī;

“Naṣiḥat” is a comprehensive word having immense scope of meaning related to each and every type of goodness or betterment.¹⁹ Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) declared; Religion is just well wishing. According to Imām Nawawī, this one ḥadīth covers the whole theme of Dīn e Islām.²⁰ That is why Imām Bukhārī put a complete chapter on such content in his compilation which also shows its core objectives. As according to above mentioned Hadīth when Jarīr b. ‘Adullah embraced Islam Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) took an oath from him along with the matter of well-wishing to the whole Muslim community and he carefully considered it throughout his life.²¹ So the Nobel duty of a true Muslim is to protect the degradation of environment anywhere that is harmful for mankind. As Abū Huraira narrated from Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) that;

”الإِيمَانُ بِضْعٌ وَسَبْعُونَ أَوْ بِضْعٌ وَسِتُّونَ شُعْبَةً فَأَفْضَلُهَا قَوْلُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَدْنَاهَا إِمَاطَةُ الْأَدَى عَنِ الطَّرِيقِ وَالْحَيَاءُ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ”²²

“Faith has over seventy branches or over sixty branches, the most excellent of which is the declaration that there is no god but Allah, and the humblest of which is the removal of what is injurious from the path: and modesty is the branch of faith.”

Here after mentioning the major branches of Imān, it is mentioned that to remove the hazardous things from the way is also one of its minor branch. The word “Aza” refers to thrones, stones and all types of filthiness, hazards discomfort or disturbance. According to Muftī Muḥammad Rafī‘ Uthmānī, it is sunnah to remove the hazardous things from the way but we are not practicing it in our even religious institutions.²³ It is also said by Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) that;

” لَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ مَنْ لَا يَأْمَنُ جَارَهُ بَوَائِقَهُ”²⁴

“He will not enter Paradise whose neighbour is not secure from his wrongful conduct.”

According to Al Khitābī, word ‘Bawāiq’ is plural of ‘Bā’iqa’, that means severely teasing others²⁵, that can be considered among one of the major environmental issues. It shows that involvement in any such activity may cause a ban from paradise that is one of the biggest rewards for a Muslim. In the light of above mentioned Prophetic guidance, it can be stated that the factory owners should not discharge their factory waste into water course and should not discharge the untreated and unfiltered factory smoke into the air, that may endangers the health of the citizens and result into many crises. Similarly, we should not smoke at public places especially in vehicles, cars, buses, planes, and trains because it may endanger the health of others. The Qurān declares these people as neighbours and advocates their rights.²⁶

Similarly, purification and cleanliness in every aspect of life is also of the same importance in Islam as the cleanliness of soul is. Since the

cleanliness of nature is a splendid duty of mankind which has been emphasized by the Islam and is reflected by the guidance related to the cleanliness of streets and removing any obstacles and harmful things from them. As Abū Huraira reported one of the sayings of Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم):

” أَنْ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ نَهَى أَنْ يُصَلَّى عَلَى قَارِعَةِ الطَّرِيقِ أَوْ يُضْرَبَ الْخَلَاءُ عَلَيْهَا أَوْ يَبَالَ فِيهَا”²⁷

“Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) forbade praying in the middle of the road, or defecating there, or urinating.”

Although this ḥadīth is da’if but is supported and supplemented by some other traditions which support it for example the narration Abū Dhar on the authority of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

” قَالَ عُرِضَتْ عَلَيَّ أَعْمَالُ أُمَّتِي حَسَنُهَا وَسَيِّئُهَا فَوَجَدْتُ فِي مَحَاسِنِ أَعْمَالِهَا الْأَذَى يُمَاطُ عَنِ الطَّرِيقِ وَوَجَدْتُ فِي مَسَاوِي أَعْمَالِهَا النُّخَاعَةَ تَكُونُ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ لَا تُدْفَنُ”²⁸

“The deeds of my people, good and bad were presented before me, and I found the removal of something objectionable from the road among their good deeds, and the sputum mucus left unburied in the mosque among their evil deeds.”

Above mentioned both tasks are considered as common human behaviours caused for land pollution positively and negatively. The removal of any pollutant from the land is evaluated as pro environmental behaviour and will be rewarded while any careless attitude that may cause distress, discomfort, hazard or contamination of land is taken as hostile to environment and will be liable to punishment.

However, Seerah prefers and endorses the idea of preserving the environment before it becomes polluted. Rather than curing and resolving the issue and ailment, it encourages the precautionary and preventive attitude. In the light of Seerah environmental pollution is considered as a failure of responsibility of human being, Prophet (PBUH) motivates its followers to be mindful about ethical value and moral responsibilities by endorsing the sense of accountability and standing in front of God. Accountability is an important aspects and element of Islamic law, that means every Muslim is to be held accountable in front of Allah on doomsday and he/she will be judged according to his/her deeds. Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said;

” أَنَّ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ عُمَرَ يَقُولُ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ ”
” مَسْئَلٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ ”

“All of you are guardians and responsible for your wards and the things under your care...”²⁹

Here, a sense of responsibility and accountability is remarkable that may implore to each and every type of attitude and behaviours done by all categories of human either as consumers or producers.

Being the firm believer of the day of judgement and accountability, every Muslim must abide all such moral lessons, as in the matter of destruction of nature and the guilty is to be held accountable. The abuse and misuse of natural resources, destruction of nature or pollution of environment, all of it is prohibited in Islam. The Muslim jurists declared such kind of conducts as sin and therefore punishable offense and misdeed.

Conclusion:

Environmental crises can blatantly see in every country of Islamic world today such as air pollution of Cairo and Tehran, hills crises of Yemen, deforestation in Bangladesh etc. Even Pakistan (the Islamic Republic) is victimized by junk of environmental crises including the global warming, air pollution and water deficiency etc. In spite of having strong religious foundations, the present day conditions of the society (in muslim countries) and their behaviours to environment transpire that their view of nature is same with modern western approach (not Islamic) which indulge mankind into environmental crises.

Due to destruction of Islamic civilization and revival of western civilization since 18th century, it seems that the Muslim society is not Islamic in its true spirit, if a little bit Islamic it reveals behind the cover of western ideas that are claimed to be perfect in all fields e.g cultural, scientific and technological ideas as contrast to the Muslim's imperfection.

Islam declares a definite purpose behind the creation of different species, be it plant or animals. Muslims are always encouraged to uphold ecological balance on natural basis. Environmental protection is the essential component of Islamic belief and main responsibility of human beings. In real sense, the Islamic view point of nature and environment is quite close to the Buddhist one although western approach after getting impression by technological advancement of Buddhist (in Japan), is trying to become global. But Islam itself has continued to flourish and remain strong religiously and spiritually and its approach towards nature and environment is still firmly grounded. Its adherents (who are less modern) and their attitudes, refused to surrender to machine life, despite of having all pressures, finally got global consideration due to its continuity and firmness

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³ Holgate, "Air Pollution and Health" , 42

⁴ A substance in the air can cause harm to humans and the environment is known as an air pollutant that can be in the form of solid particles, liquid droplets or gases.

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- ²⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al Muslim*, kitab al iman, bab. Biyan Tehrim iza al Jar, h.8
- ²⁵ Ḥamd b. Muḥammad Al Khatābī, *Gharīb al Ḥadīth*, vol.3(Damishq: Dār al Fikr,1403A.H),61. and

Ibn Al Athīr, *Al Nihāya fī Gharīb al Ḥadīth*, vol.1(Irān: Muṭbū‘āti ‘Ilīyān Qum),16. in the root word,B-W-Q(بوق)

²⁶ "وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِأَلْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ وَاعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ
بِالْجُنُبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَنْ كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا"

Holy Qurān, 4;36

²⁷ ‘Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, (Riyadh: *Al Maktabah Al Ma‘ārif*, 2001)Kitab al Taharah, Bab an Nahi an al khala ala qariha al tariq,h.330

²⁸ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al Muslim*, Kitab al masjid, bab.nahi an al baṢaq fil masjid fi salah wa ghairaha, h.1138.

²⁹ Al Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī*,kitab al jumah,Bab al Jumah fil qura wal mudan,h. 846