

Natural Resource Exploitation and Ecological Justice in the Qur'anic Perspective: A Thematic Analysis of Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab

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Abstract

Excessive exploitation of natural resources has become one of the most pressing ecological issues of contemporary times, marked by environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and disruption of ecosystem balance. The Qur'an, as a comprehensive guide for human life, provides ethical principles that position human beings as khalifah (stewards) of the earth with a moral obligation to manage and preserve the natural world responsibly. This study analyzes the concepts of natural resource exploitation and ecological justice in the Qur'anic perspective through a thematic examination of Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab. Employing a qualitative library research methodology with a thematic exegesis (tafsir maudhu'i) approach, the study focuses on three key Qur'anic verses, namely QS. al-A'raf/7:56, QS. ar-Rum/30:41, and QS. al-Qashash/28:77. Data were analyzed using content analysis to extract the moral, theological, and ecological dimensions embedded in Shihab's interpretive framework. The findings demonstrate that Tafsir Al-Misbah construes nature as part of God's divinely ordered creation, endowed with balance (mizan) that must be stewardly managed. Unrestricted exploitation of natural resources is deemed contrary to the Qur'anic principles of mizan (cosmic balance), fasad (prohibition of corruption and destruction), and the human covenant of khilafah. Ecological justice, in this Qur'anic framework, encompasses not only environmental preservation but also the fair, proportional, and sustainable use of natural resources so that their benefits extend to all living beings and future generations. The ecological values embedded in Tafsir Al-Misbah carry significant relevance as an ethical foundation for addressing contemporary environmental crises and cultivating ecological consciousness within Muslim societies.

Keywords: Natural resource exploitation; ecological justice; Qur'an; Tafsir Al-Misbah; environmental ethics; Islamic eco-theology.

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INTRODUCTION

The ecological crisis confronting humanity in the twenty-first century represents one of the most formidable challenges in the history of civilization. Scientific evidence consistently documents alarming rates of deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, marine ecosystem collapse, and anthropogenic climate change, all of which are direct consequences of

unsustainable patterns of natural resource exploitation (IPCC, 2023). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, global surface temperatures have increased by approximately 1.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, while the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020) estimates that approximately ten million hectares of forest are lost annually. These trends reveal not merely a technical or scientific failure but a profound moral and ethical crisis in the relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Indonesia, as one of the world's most biologically diverse nations, is particularly vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation. With approximately 17,000 plant and animal species inhabiting only 2 percent of the earth's landmass, Indonesia is classified as a megadiverse country, yet it faces severe ecological threats from rampant deforestation, illegal mining, coastal erosion, and the overextraction of fisheries resources (Center for International Forestry Research, 2016). The ecological disasters that struck Sumatra in late 2025, resulting in massive floods and landslides that killed hundreds of people and displaced over 100,000 families, serve as stark testament to the consequences of decades of irresponsible resource exploitation.

Scholars and environmentalists have increasingly recognized that the roots of the ecological crisis are not purely technical but are deeply embedded in worldviews, value systems, and moral frameworks that govern human relationships with nature. Lynn White Jr. (1967), in his seminal essay, argued that the Western anthropocentric worldview, which places human beings as the absolute masters of nature, provided historical justification for ecological exploitation. Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1968) contended that the loss of spiritual values in the human relationship with nature is the fundamental cause of the contemporary environmental crisis. These analyses open a compelling inquiry into whether religious traditions, and Islam in particular, can offer viable ethical frameworks for confronting the ecological crisis.

The Qur'an, as the primary scriptural authority in Islam, contains numerous verses that address the relationship between human beings, nature, and God. Far from being exclusively concerned with ritual worship, Qur'anic teachings encompass principles governing human social life and the natural environment. The earth is presented as an amanah (sacred trust) entrusted by God to humanity, and the exploitation of the natural world beyond ethical limits is explicitly condemned as fasad, a concept that encompasses moral corruption, social injustice, and ecological destruction. QS. al-A'raf/7:56 categorically prohibits human beings from causing corruption and destruction in the earth after it has been set in righteous order. QS. ar-Rum/30:41 attributes the emergence of corruption in land and sea directly to human actions. QS. al-Qashash/28:77 warns against using God's gifts to cause harm and destruction.

Within the field of Islamic environmental ethics, Tafsir Al-Misbah by the prominent Indonesian Muslim scholar Muhammad Quraish Shihab occupies a significant position. As a contemporary Nusantara tafsir (indigenous Southeast Asian Qur'anic commentary) published in 2002, Tafsir Al-Misbah employs a contextual, social-integrative approach (al-adabi al-ijtima'i) that connects Qur'anic teachings directly to the social and environmental realities of Indonesian Muslim society. Shihab's interpretive methodology emphasizes the principles of mizan (cosmic balance), the prohibition of fasad (corruption and destruction), the concept of

ihsan (excellence in conduct), and the human obligation of khalifah (stewardship) as the pillars of an Islamic ecological ethic.

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic environmental ethics and Qur'anic ecology, existing studies have generally addressed these themes in broad and sometimes unsystematic ways. Studies such as those by Sutanto (2019), Zakiyuddin (2024), and Begyani (2022) have explored Shihab's environmental thought in Tafsir Al-Misbah, but none has conducted a focused, multi-verse analysis of natural resource exploitation and ecological justice through the specific lens of QS. al-A'raf/7:56, QS. ar-Rum/30:41, and QS. al-Qashash/28:77 as an integrated ethical framework. This study addresses that gap by undertaking a systematic thematic analysis of these three Qur'anic verses as interpreted in Tafsir Al-Misbah, with the aim of constructing an ecologically coherent and theologically grounded model of Islamic ecological justice.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing academic field of Islamic environmental humanities by providing a rigorous textual and theological analysis of Qur'anic ecological principles. Second, it demonstrates the contemporary relevance of a classical religious text in addressing urgent ecological challenges. Third, by focusing on Tafsir Al-Misbah, it highlights the potential of indigenous Southeast Asian Islamic scholarship in articulating ecological ethics that are culturally accessible and contextually relevant for Indonesian Muslim communities. The ultimate aim is to offer a religiously grounded paradigm of ecological justice that can serve as an ethical counterweight to the exploitative development models that have caused widespread environmental devastation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Environmental Ethics and Eco-Theology

The field of Islamic eco-theology has expanded substantially over the past four decades, drawing on both classical Qur'anic exegesis and contemporary environmental philosophy. Nasr (1968) was among the first scholars to articulate an Islamic ecological philosophy, arguing that the spiritual crisis underlying the modern environmental catastrophe reflects humanity's abandonment of its sacred covenant as steward of God's creation. This argument has been developed by subsequent scholars who have explored the Qur'anic concepts of tawhid (divine unity), khalifah (stewardship), and amanah (trust) as the foundations of an Islamic environmental ethic.

Mujiyono Abdillah (2001), in his foundational work *Agama Ramah Lingkungan*, demonstrated that the Qur'an contains a rich ecology of concepts that can be mobilized to construct a comprehensive environmental ethic. He identified mizan (balance), ishlah (restoration), and ihsan (excellence) as key Qur'anic principles with direct ecological implications. Similarly, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2001) argued in *Ri'ayah al-Bi'ah fi Syari'ah al-Islam* that the protection of the natural environment (hifz al-bi'ah) constitutes a foundational objective of Islamic law, equivalent in importance to the preservation of life, intellect, progeny, and property.

More recent scholarship has extended this eco-theological framework to address specific environmental crises. Khalid (2002) examined the relationship between Islamic teachings and

environmental conservation, highlighting how Qur'anic principles of moderation (wasatiyyah) and justice (adl) can provide guidance for sustainable resource management. Abdul Mustaqim (2024), in his *Tafsir Ekologi*, articulated a model of eco-theological interpretation that reads Qur'anic verses in light of contemporary ecological science, arguing that the Qur'an anticipates many of the insights of modern environmental ethics.

Tafsir Al-Misbah and Environmental Themes

Tafsir Al-Misbah has attracted scholarly attention for its distinctive approach to Qur'anic interpretation, characterized by its integration of linguistic analysis, contextual reasoning, and social-ethical reflection. Several studies have examined Shihab's treatment of environmental themes within this commentary.

Sutanto (2019) analyzed Shihab's interpretation of environmental verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah, finding that Shihab consistently emphasizes the human obligation to preserve ecological balance as an expression of khalifah responsibility. Zakiyuddin (2024) explored Shihab's views on environmental conservation, demonstrating that his interpretive approach grounds ecological responsibility in the concept of amanah. Begyani (2022) examined the concept of environmental love in Islam through QS. al-A'raf/7:56-58 in Tafsir Al-Misbah, focusing on its implications for environmental education. Nuraini Sutrisno and Azmi (2025) conducted a comparative analysis of Tafsir Al-Azhar and Tafsir Al-Misbah on the theme of exploitation in QS. ar-Rum/30:41, concluding that both commentaries attribute environmental destruction directly to human moral failure.

At the international level, comparative studies of Islamic environmental ethics have been conducted by scholars such as Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin (2003), who documented how classical and contemporary Muslim scholars have interpreted Qur'anic teachings on the environment. Ozdemir (2003) analyzed the concept of stewardship (khalifah) in Islamic thought and its implications for environmental responsibility, while Haq (2001) examined how the Qur'anic worldview differs from anthropocentric Western environmental philosophy.

Ecological Justice in Contemporary Discourse

The concept of ecological justice, understood as the fair and responsible distribution of environmental benefits and burdens across human communities, species, and generations, has emerged as a central theme in both environmental philosophy and environmental law. Andrew Dobson (1998) argued that ecological justice encompasses not only the distribution of natural resources but also the moral relationship between human beings and the natural world. Robyn Eckersley (1992) advanced an ecocentric theory of ecological justice that grounds environmental responsibility in the intrinsic value of all living systems, not merely their utility to humans.

Within the Indonesian legal and environmental context, Purwendah (2022) identified four dimensions of ecological justice, namely distributive justice (equitable sharing of natural resources), procedural justice (inclusive decision-making on environmental issues), corrective justice (remediation of environmental harm), and intergenerational justice (protection of

future generations' rights to a healthy environment). These dimensions provide a useful framework for evaluating how Qur'anic ecological principles, as interpreted by Shihab, can contribute to a robust and actionable model of ecological justice.

Imron Mashadi (2025) proposed integrating the maqasid al-shari'ah framework with ecological justice, arguing that the preservation of the environment constitutes a sixth foundational objective of Islamic law alongside the classical five objectives of preserving life, intellect, religion, progeny, and property. This theoretical move has significant implications for how Islamic environmental ethics can be operationalized within contemporary legal and policy frameworks.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a library research (penelitian kepustakaan) approach, focusing on the analysis of primary and secondary textual sources relevant to the themes of natural resource exploitation, ecological justice, and Qur'anic environmental ethics. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth, interpretive exploration of the meanings, values, and conceptual structures embedded in scholarly and scriptural texts, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods.

The primary data source is Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an by M. Quraish Shihab (2002), published in 15 volumes by Lentera Hati, Jakarta. This commentary serves as the principal object of interpretive analysis. Secondary sources include classical Qur'anic commentaries such as Tafsir al-Tabari (Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil ay al-Qur'an), Tafsir al-Qurthubi (Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an), Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azhim), and Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah al-Zuhaili, as well as contemporary works in Islamic environmental ethics, environmental philosophy, and ecological justice studies. Additional sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, dissertations, and reports from international environmental organizations including the FAO, IPCC, UNEP, and CIFOR.

The methodological framework for Qur'anic analysis is the thematic exegesis (tafsir maudhu'i) method. This method, developed systematically within the Islamic exegetical tradition, involves collecting Qur'anic verses that share a common theme, examining their linguistic and contextual dimensions, and synthesizing their meanings into a coherent conceptual framework. The method was employed to analyze three key Qur'anic verses, namely QS. al-A'raf/7:56, QS. ar-Rum/30:41, and QS. al-Qashash/28:77, which were selected because they contain the most direct and substantive Qur'anic references to environmental destruction, the causal relationship between human behavior and ecological degradation, and the ethical limits of natural resource use.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis (analisis isi), a systematic method for examining the substantive content of texts in order to identify recurring themes, conceptual relationships, and argumentative structures. The analytical process proceeded through four stages. First, identification of the linguistic and semantic meanings of key Qur'anic terms in Shihab's commentary, including fasad, mizan, ihsan, islah, amanah, and khalifah. Second, classification of these concepts according to their ecological, ethical, and theological

significance. Third, interpretive integration, in which the ecological implications of Shihab's exegesis were synthesized with contemporary environmental philosophy and ecological justice theory. Fourth, critical evaluation of the relevance and contribution of Shihab's interpretive framework to contemporary ecological challenges.

The validity and reliability of the analysis were strengthened through triangulation of sources, involving comparison of Shihab's interpretations with those of classical and contemporary commentators, as well as cross-referencing with empirical environmental literature. This methodological approach ensures that the findings are grounded in both textual integrity and empirical relevance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Fasad in Qur'anic Ecology: Toward a Theology of Environmental Destruction

The analysis of QS. al-A'raf/7:56 within Tafsir Al-Misbah reveals that the Qur'anic concept of fasad functions as the central theological category for understanding environmental destruction. The verse states,

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا

"And do not cause corruption upon the earth after it has been set in order." (QS. al-A'raf/7:56)

The Arabic term fasad, derived from the root f-s-d, carries a semantic range that encompasses physical destruction, moral corruption, and social injustice. Linguistically, Ibn Manzur's Lisan al-Arab defines fasad as the opposite of salah (righteousness, goodness), indicating a comprehensive rupture of order and harmony (Ibn Manzur, n.d.). Al-Raghib al-Ashfahani, in his Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an, extends this definition to encompass the disruption of any system, whether moral, social, or ecological, that God has set in right order (Al-Ashfahani, 2009). In his commentary on this verse, Shihab interprets fasad as encompassing all forms of destruction that disrupt the divinely established harmony of creation, including deforestation, pollution, overextraction of natural resources, and the destruction of ecosystems (Shihab, 2002, vol. 5, pp. 152-154).

Crucially, Shihab's interpretation emphasizes the phrase ba'da islahiha (after it has been set in order), which he reads as a divine declaration that the earth was created in a state of primordial ecological balance and harmony. This hermeneutic move has profound ecological implications, as it grounds the prohibition of environmental destruction not in instrumental human interests but in the intrinsic sacred order of creation itself. The earth, in Shihab's reading, possesses a divinely established ecological integrity that human beings are morally obligated to honor and preserve (Shihab, 2002, vol. 5, p. 154).

Classical commentators reinforce this reading. Al-Qurthubi, in Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an, interprets the prohibition of fasad as encompassing any form of injustice or destruction that disrupts the divinely willed order of existence, including the killing of animals without legitimate reason, the destruction of vegetation, and the pollution of water sources (Al-Qurthubi, 1936, p. 226). Al-Tabari's Jami' al-Bayan extends this analysis to include all forms of corruption that threaten the integrity of the ecological and social order established by God (Al-Tabari, 2001, vol. 12, p. 312).

The verse also introduces the concept of *ihsan* as the ethical counterpart to *fasad*. Shihab interprets the concluding phrase of QS. al-A'raf/7:56, which states that the mercy of God is near to those who practice *ihsan*, as establishing a direct theological link between excellence in ecological conduct and divine favor. *Ihsan*, in this ecological context, signifies not merely the avoidance of environmental destruction but the active cultivation of a harmonious, restorative, and generous relationship with the natural world. This framing elevates ecological responsibility from a merely legal obligation to a spiritual practice.

The concept of *ishlah* (restoration and reform) further enriches this ecological framework. Qur'anically, *ishlah* denotes the process of repairing what has been broken and restoring what has been corrupted to its rightful condition. In the context of QS. al-A'raf/7:56, *ishlah* refers to the primordial state of ecological balance that God established at creation, and which human beings are called to preserve and restore. Shihab emphasizes that the human mandate of *khalifah* is not simply a permission to utilize natural resources but a solemn covenant to maintain and restore the ecological integrity of the earth (Shihab, 2002, vol. 5, p. 155). This reading is consistent with contemporary environmental ethics, which increasingly recognizes the importance of ecological restoration as a component of environmental justice (Dobson, 1998).

A comparative reading with Sayyid Qutb's *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* reveals that while Qutb focuses on the political and social dimensions of *fasad*, interpreting it primarily as a form of ideological corruption that undermines just governance (Qutb, 2003, p. 1298), Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Misbah* extends the concept explicitly to the ecological domain, making it directly applicable to contemporary environmental crises. Wahbah al-Zuhaili's *Tafsir al-Munir* similarly reads *fasad* as encompassing any action that disturbs the cosmic balance established by God, including environmental destruction (Al-Zuhaili, 2003, vol. 10, p. 205).

The analytical framework derived from Shihab's interpretation of *fasad* in QS. al-A'raf/7:56 can be usefully mapped onto contemporary environmental ethics. The anthropocentric paradigm, which Lynn White Jr. (1967) identified as the ideological root of the ecological crisis, is directly challenged by Shihab's reading, which refuses to reduce the value of the natural world to its utility for human beings. Instead, the Qur'anic prohibition of *fasad* implies what environmental philosophers would call the intrinsic value of nature, grounded not in abstract philosophical reasoning but in divine creation and covenant. This represents a significant contribution to the broader conversation between religious traditions and environmental philosophy.

Human Agency and Ecological Causality in QS. ar-Rum/30:41

The second focal verse, QS. ar-Rum/30:41, offers what is perhaps the most direct Qur'anic statement on the causal relationship between human behavior and ecological destruction. The verse states,

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ

"Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by reason of what the hands of people have earned." (QS. ar-Rum/30:41)

In his commentary on this verse, Shihab articulates a sophisticated theory of ecological causality that bears striking resemblance to contemporary scientific understandings of

anthropogenic environmental change. He interprets the phrase *bima kasabat aydi al-nas* (by reason of what the hands of people have earned) as establishing a direct causal link between human moral choices, specifically greed, injustice, and the violation of God's ethical order, and the emergence of ecological destruction in both terrestrial and marine environments (Shihab, 2002, vol. 11, pp. 76-79).

This interpretive move is theologically significant. Rather than attributing environmental disasters to divine punishment or natural inevitability, Shihab locates their cause squarely in human agency and moral responsibility. This framing has profound implications for environmental ethics, as it rejects fatalistic interpretations of ecological crises and instead demands human accountability and action. The verse thus functions as a Qur'anic theory of anthropogenic environmental change, anticipating by fourteen centuries the central insight of contemporary environmental science.

Classical commentators offer complementary readings of this verse. Al-Qurthubi interprets the *fasad* in land and sea as encompassing physical environmental destruction, including the drying of rivers, the reduction of agricultural productivity, and the disruption of ecological cycles, all of which he attributes to the moral failings of human beings (Al-Qurthubi, 2006, vol. 14, p. 40). Al-Tabari, in his earlier commentary, emphasizes the comprehensive scope of the phrase, reading it as a universal principle that attributes all forms of worldly disruption, natural and social, to human transgression (Al-Tabari, 2001, vol. 20, p. 99). Nuraini Sutrisno and Azmi (2025) found in their comparative study of *Tafsir Al-Azhar* and *Tafsir Al-Misbah* that both commentaries converge on the interpretation that ecological destruction is a consequence of human moral failure, though Shihab's reading is more explicitly connected to social and economic exploitation.

Shihab's interpretation of QS. ar-Rum/30:41 resonates strongly with contemporary empirical evidence on the drivers of ecological degradation. The FAO (2020) documents that the primary drivers of global deforestation are agricultural expansion, unsustainable logging, and mining, all of which are expressions of economic greed and the prioritization of short-term profit over long-term ecological sustainability. The UNEP (2011) similarly attributes the degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems primarily to human activities including overfishing, coastal development, and marine pollution. These contemporary findings validate the Qur'anic insight that ecological destruction is fundamentally a product of human moral choices.

The concept of *mizan* (balance) plays a central role in Shihab's ecological interpretation of this verse. Drawing on QS. ar-Rahman/55:7-9, which states that God raised the heavens and established the balance (*mizan*), commanding human beings not to transgress against it, Shihab argues that the ecological balance of the earth is a divinely established cosmic order that human beings are obligated to maintain. The disruption of this balance through unchecked exploitation constitutes a violation not merely of environmental ethics but of the divine covenant itself (Shihab, 2002, vol. 11, p. 78). This interpretation situates ecological responsibility within the framework of Islamic spirituality and covenant theology, giving it a depth and urgency that purely philosophical environmental ethics cannot provide.

The relevance of this analysis to contemporary Indonesian ecological realities is demonstrated by the devastating floods and landslides in Sumatra in late 2025, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and the displacement of over 100,000 families. Environmental experts attributed the severity of these disasters in part to massive deforestation in upstream areas, as documented by Greenpeace Indonesia's forest campaign director, and the BNPB estimated rehabilitation costs of over 51 trillion Indonesian rupiahs. These events illustrate with painful clarity the real-world consequences of what Shihab, following the Qur'an, identifies as *fasad* in the land, namely the destruction of ecological systems through human greed and irresponsibility.

Shihab's reading of QS. ar-Rum/30:41 also has important implications for the concept of ecological justice. If human beings are the primary agents of ecological destruction, then the remediation of that destruction is a moral and religious obligation, not merely a technical challenge. This perspective aligns with what Purwendah (2022) calls restorative ecological justice, which demands that those who have caused environmental harm are obligated to repair it and bear the costs of ecological restoration. It also resonates with Dobson's (1998) argument that ecological justice requires accountability for the historical and ongoing contribution of human activities to environmental degradation.

The Ethics of Resource Utilization in QS. al-Qashash/28:77

The third focal verse, QS. al-Qashash/28:77, provides an important Qur'anic framework for the ethics of natural resource utilization. The verse states,

وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفُسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ

"And do not seek to cause corruption in the earth." (QS. al-Qashash/28:77)

This verse appears in the Qur'anic narrative of Qarun (Korah), a figure who accumulated extraordinary wealth but was consumed by arrogance and greed, attributing his fortune entirely to his own intelligence and skill rather than acknowledging it as a gift from God. His eventual punishment, described as being swallowed by the earth together with his wealth, serves as a powerful Qur'anic parable about the catastrophic consequences of treating natural resources as instruments of unchecked personal enrichment and power.

Shihab's commentary on this verse articulates what might be called a theology of moderate and just resource utilization. While the verse does not prohibit the use of natural resources for human welfare and economic development, it establishes clear ethical boundaries on the form and extent of such use. Shihab interprets the prohibition of *fasad* in this context as a condemnation of any pattern of resource exploitation that is motivated solely by greed, that exceeds legitimate need, or that causes harm to other human beings, living creatures, or the ecological system on which all life depends (Shihab, 2002, vol. 10, pp. 405-408).

The Qur'anic concept of *amanah* (sacred trust) is central to Shihab's interpretation of this verse. Drawing on QS. al-Ahzab/33:72, which describes the cosmic covenant (*amanah*) that the heavens, earth, and mountains refused to bear, and which was accepted by human beings, Shihab argues that natural resources are a trust entrusted by God to humanity, not the exclusive property of any individual, corporation, or generation. The exploitation of natural resources for private gain at the expense of public ecological welfare therefore constitutes a

betrayal of this divine trust, a khiyanah (treachery) that is morally equivalent to the transgression of Qarun (Shihab, 2002, vol. 10, p. 407).

This theological framing has significant implications for contemporary debates about natural resource governance. It challenges the premise of purely market-based or state-based approaches to resource management by insisting that natural resources carry a moral dimension that transcends their economic value. The principle of amanah implies that resource governance must be oriented not merely toward efficiency or economic growth but toward the fulfillment of obligations to present and future generations, to other species, and to the ecological integrity of the earth as a whole. This resonates with what Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri (2002) described as the three functions of ecological justice, namely the support of life processes, the conservation of biodiversity, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Al-Syatibi's al-Muwafaqat provides a classical jurisprudential framework that complements Shihab's reading. Al-Syatibi identifies the preservation of natural resources (hifz al-bi'ah) as a foundational requirement of Islamic law, grounded in the principle of maslaha (public welfare). He argues that the exploitation of natural resources in ways that undermine the foundations of ecological life constitutes a violation of the primary objectives of Islamic law (Al-Syatibi, 2004, vol. 2, p. 18). This jurisprudential perspective is amplified by contemporary scholars such as Imron Mashadi (2025), who proposes that the maqasid al-shari'ah framework explicitly include the protection of the environment as a primary legal objective.

The concept of wasatiyyah (moderation) also features prominently in Shihab's ecological reading of QS. al-Qashash/28:77. He interprets the Qur'anic injunction not to seek fasad as a call for a balanced and moderate approach to natural resource use that avoids both total abstention and unlimited exploitation. This Qur'anic concept of moderation in resource use resonates with contemporary principles of sustainable development, which seek to balance present economic needs with the preservation of ecological systems for future generations (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011). However, Shihab's approach goes beyond secular sustainability discourse by grounding the imperative of ecological moderation in the spiritual reality of divine sovereignty over the natural world.

Constructing an Integrated Framework of Qur'anic Ecological Justice

The synthesis of Shihab's interpretations of the three focal verses enables the construction of an integrated framework of Qur'anic ecological justice that is simultaneously theological, ethical, and practical. This framework is organized around five interrelated principles, each of which is grounded in Qur'anic vocabulary and developed through Shihab's contextual exegesis.

The first principle is the intrinsic sacred value of creation (qimah khalqiyyah). Shihab's interpretation of the Qur'anic prohibition of fasad implies that the natural world possesses a divinely established value that is independent of its instrumental utility for human beings. The earth was created by God in a state of ecological balance and harmony (islah), and this primordial order carries a sacred character that human beings are obligated to respect. This

principle challenges the anthropocentric worldview that treats nature purely as a resource for human use and provides a theological grounding for the ecocentric environmental ethics articulated by Eckersley (1992) and others.

The second principle is human accountability for ecological outcomes (*mas'uliyah*). QS. ar-Rum/30:41 establishes that the corruption and destruction of the natural world are direct consequences of human moral choices. This principle demands that human beings accept responsibility for the ecological consequences of their actions, including patterns of consumption, production, and governance that lead to environmental degradation. In the contemporary context, this principle has implications for corporate responsibility, governmental accountability, and individual consumer ethics.

The third principle is the covenant of stewardship (*khalifah wa amanah*). The Qur'anic concept of *khalifah*, as interpreted by Shihab, positions human beings not as the absolute masters of nature but as God's trustees, entrusted with the responsibility of managing the earth according to divine principles of justice, balance, and compassion. This stewardship covenant implies that natural resources are not the exclusive property of any individual or generation but are held in trust for all living beings and for future generations. The violation of this covenant through unchecked exploitation constitutes a moral transgression of the highest order.

The fourth principle is the obligation of ecological restoration (*ishlah*). Just as the Qur'an prohibits the causing of ecological corruption, it implies the positive obligation to restore what has been damaged. This principle is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where decades of deforestation, mining, and coastal development have caused extensive ecological damage that requires sustained investment in ecological restoration. Shihab's reading of *ishlah* as a continuous process of repair and renewal provides a theological rationale for ecological restoration programs that goes beyond mere economic calculation.

The fifth principle is intergenerational and interspecies justice (*adl bayna al-ajyal wa al-anwa'*). The Qur'anic prohibition of resource exploitation that causes ecological destruction implies a duty of justice not only toward present human communities but also toward future generations and other living species. This principle resonates with what contemporary environmental law and ethics describes as intergenerational equity and species justice. In Shihab's framework, this obligation is grounded in the divine command to maintain ecological balance for the benefit of all creation, not merely for the satisfaction of present human needs.

Relevance of Tafsir Al-Misbah to Contemporary Ecological Challenges

The ecological framework derived from Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Misbah* carries substantial relevance for addressing contemporary environmental challenges in Indonesia and beyond. At the theoretical level, it provides a theologically grounded alternative to both purely anthropocentric and purely ecocentric environmental ethics, one that integrates concern for human welfare with reverence for the sacred order of creation. At the practical level, it offers a set of principles that can guide the development of more ecologically responsible patterns of resource governance, corporate behavior, and individual consumption.

The concept of ecological justice articulated through Shihab's exegesis is particularly relevant to the Indonesian context, where patterns of natural resource exploitation have historically benefited a small elite while imposing disproportionate ecological costs on marginalized rural and coastal communities. The Qur'anic principle of distributive ecological justice demands that the benefits of natural resource use be distributed equitably and that the costs of ecological degradation not be borne disproportionately by the poor and vulnerable. This principle provides religious validation for civil society and advocacy efforts to challenge exploitative development models.

The role of Islamic institutions in promoting ecological consciousness is also highlighted by this analysis. Shihab's reading of the relevant Qur'anic verses suggests that Islamic educational institutions, including pesantren, madrasah, and university-level Islamic studies programs, have an important role to play in cultivating ecological awareness among Muslim communities. The integration of environmental ethics into Islamic education curricula, informed by the Qur'anic principles of khalifah, amanah, and mizan, can contribute to the formation of a generation of Muslim citizens committed to ecological stewardship. This aligns with what Garner (2006) describes as the role of religious communities in inspiring progress toward sustainable development.

At the international level, Shihab's ecological framework contributes to the growing conversation between Islamic environmental ethics and global sustainability discourse. The Qur'anic principles of mizan and wasatiyyah resonate with the sustainability principles articulated in international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, while grounding them in a theological framework that speaks directly to the moral commitments of Muslim communities worldwide. This contribution is particularly significant given that Muslim-majority countries are disproportionately affected by climate change and ecological degradation (IPCC, 2023).

However, the translation of Qur'anic ecological principles into effective environmental policy and practice faces significant challenges. The persistence of exploitative development models, weak regulatory enforcement, and the economic pressures facing developing nations mean that ecological ethics can easily be marginalized in practice. The ecological disasters in Sumatra in 2025, in which logging interests, inadequate governance, and weak enforcement of environmental regulations contributed to catastrophic floods and landslides, illustrate the gap between Qur'anic ecological ideals and current realities. Bridging this gap will require not only theological articulation but also sustained engagement with policy, law, civil society, and economic structures.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab provides a rich, contextually relevant, and theologically rigorous framework for understanding the Qur'anic principles of ecological justice and for addressing the contemporary crisis of natural resource exploitation. Through a thematic analysis of three key Qur'anic verses, namely QS. al-A'raf/7:56, QS. ar-Rum/30:41, and QS. al-Qashash/28:77, the study has identified five interrelated principles that constitute an integrated model of Qur'anic ecological justice.

First, the Qur'anic prohibition of *fasad* establishes the intrinsic sacred value of the natural world and grounds the obligation to preserve ecological integrity in divine creation and covenant, not merely in human utility. Second, the Qur'anic attribution of ecological destruction to human moral choices (*bima kasabat aydi al-nas*) establishes a principle of human accountability for ecological outcomes that demands moral and practical responsibility for environmental degradation. Third, the concepts of *khalifah* and *amanah* position human beings as trustees, not masters, of the natural world, obligating them to manage natural resources in accordance with principles of justice, moderation, and compassion for all living beings. Fourth, the concept of *ishlah* demands not only the prevention of ecological destruction but the active restoration of what has been damaged. Fifth, the Qur'anic ethic of *mizan* and *adl* implies a principle of intergenerational and interspecies justice that extends ecological responsibility beyond the present moment.

The ecological values embedded in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* are not merely of historical or theological interest. They carry urgent practical relevance for Indonesian society and for Muslim communities worldwide, offering a religiously grounded ethical framework for challenging exploitative development models, promoting ecological restoration, and cultivating a culture of environmental stewardship rooted in Qur'anic values.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis is primarily textual and theological, focusing on Shihab's exegesis rather than empirically examining the actual impact of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* on environmental attitudes or behaviors within Indonesian Muslim communities. Future research should explore the social reception and practical influence of Shihab's ecological ethics through empirical sociological and anthropological methods. Additionally, comparative studies of ecological ethics in different Qur'anic commentary traditions, both within Indonesia and across the broader Muslim world, would significantly enrich the field.

In conclusion, *Tafsir Al-Misbah* demonstrates the capacity of Islamic exegetical scholarship to engage substantively with contemporary ecological challenges, offering a distinctive and valuable contribution to the global conversation on environmental ethics, ecological justice, and sustainable development. The integration of Qur'anic ecological principles into Islamic education, environmental governance, and public discourse represents an important pathway toward a more just and sustainable relationship between humanity and the natural world.

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