

A SHARIAH PERSPECTIVE ON PRESERVATION OF LIFE (HIFZ AL-NAFS) AND THE ENVIRONMENT (HIFZ AL-BĪ'AH): A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17949593>

Keywords

Hifz al-nafs, Hifz al-biah, Deforestation, Smog, Preservation, Environment

Article History

Received: 16 October 2025

Accepted: 29 November 2025

Published: 16 December 2025

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Abstract

This study explores the Shariah perspectives on the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*) and environment (*hifz al-bī'ah*) in the context of Pakistan. It utilizes the Quran, hadith, classical jurisprudence, and contemporary scholarship to identify core theological and ethical principles that safeguard both human beings and the natural world. Pakistan currently experiences significant environmental challenges, including the Lahore smog crisis, the 2025 floods, cloudbursts in Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, deforestation, and water scarcity, all of which are substantial risks to ecosystems and human life. Through case studies addressing flood impacts, urban air pollution, water shortages, and waterborne diseases, the research highlights the consequences of environmental degradation. The analysis applies Shariah-based concepts, such as (*hifz al-nafs*) and the principle of trusteeship, to environmental policy and ethics. It further compares Islamic ethical frameworks with Pakistani environmental legislation, with particular attention to the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act of 1997, Clean Air act 2014 and Pakistan's National Clean Air Policy 2023. The study aims to establish that Islamic teachings and legal principles provide effective support for environmental protection as an extension of life preservation, and to recommend that Pakistan align its policies with these values to advance both human and environmental well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is facing numerous environmental challenges despite its low contribution to global carbon emissions, in contrast to its neighboring countries, China and India. Deforestation, Pollution due to smog and fog, Climate change, and resource depletion are the biggest threats to the ecosystem and human life. The polluted cities and floodplains of Pakistan make it imperative to plan an ethical framework that can guide sustainable solutions for (*hifz al-nafs*) and the environment. It is the responsibility of humans to protect their environment, and the Quran and Sunnah also emphasize these teachings. Islamic

concepts Tawhid, Khalifah, and Amanah point out that nature is God's creation entrusted to humanity.ⁱ Environmental protection (*hifz al-bī'ah*) is a branch of Islamic jurisprudence that explores Islamic laws, ethics, and principles in preserving, protecting, and managing the ecosystem as part of human religious responsibility to Allah.ⁱⁱ

In Pakistan, for the protection of the environment, the PEPA Pakistan Environmental Protection Act, 1997 was introduced, which extends to the whole of Pakistan. This act provided the basis for federally run environmental governance in the country until 2010,

after which the 18th amendment of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan gave legislative powers to provinces on the subject of environment.ⁱⁱⁱ

The PEPA 1997, though fully functional in documents, failed practically to fulfill its purpose due to a lack of resources, governance issues, and political instability. While PEPA in its early years provided a necessary legal and institutional framework, its implementation remains weak throughout history. Water scarcity, Climate change, Environmental degradation, and poor air quality have worsened since 1997. Similarly Clean Air act 2014 and Pakistan's National Clean Air Policy 2023 also failed to fulfill their basic purpose.^{iv}

Maqasid al Shariah clearly include that preservation of life (*hifz al-nafs*), and welfare (Maslahah) indicate that it is not permissible to harm the environment because it supports life. This research explores these Islamic teachings and compares them to Pakistan's contemporary environmental policies. First, it investigates the Quran, Sunnah, and modern scholarship, then analyzes major environmental issues in Pakistan and case studies of their human impact. Finally, it discusses how Islamic legal maxims like (*hifz al-nafs*) and *amanah* can inform ethical policy, contrasting them with existing Pakistani laws.

Problem Statement

Pakistan faces acute environmental challenges, including deforestation, air and water pollution, and climate induced disasters such as cloud bursts and flash floods. These issues endangered the preservation of human life (*hifz al-nafs*), which is one of the primary objectives of Shariah. Despite the Islamic teachings' emphasis on environmental protection, the application of Islamic ethical principles to contemporary policy-making in Pakistan remains vulnerable. This gap creates an urgent need to study how Shariah perspectives can inform sustainable environmental governanc

Research Objectives

1. To examine Islamic legal principles regarding the preservation of Nafs and the environment.
2. To evaluate the environmental challenges facing Pakistan and recommend a Shariah-based ethics and framework for solution.

Research Questions

1. How does Shariah conceptualize the *hifz al-nafs* concerning environmental protection?
2. What are the Islamic ethical principles that guide Pakistan's environmental policies and contribute to safeguarding both human life and the ecosystem?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Qur'anic Guidance on Life and Nature

The Qur'an emphasizes many times (*hifz al-nafs*) and the environment. One of the Quranic verses says:

"..He who slays a soul unless it be (in punishment) for murder or for spreading mischief on earth shall be as if he had slain all mankind; and he who saves a life shall be as if he had given life to all mankind".^v

The above verse directly explains the sanctity of human life, indicating that whoever preserves one life, it is as saving humanity, while a person who kills only one person unjustly is as killing all humanity.

In another verse, Allah says:

"Spend in the cause of Allah and do not let your own hands throw you into destruction by withholding"^{vi}

Classical scholars explain in the justification of this verse that the verse is not only about transaction negligence, but it is also about all those actions that destroy or harm people and the environment.

The Quran also states that:

"Indeed, we offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they all declined to bear it, being fearful of it. But humanity assumed it"^{vii}

Islamic scholars interpret "the trust: as the Amanah given to humans alone by Allah Almighty.

In Surah Rum, Allah says, "*Corruption has spread on land and sea as a result of what people's hands have done, so that Allah may cause them to taste the consequences of some of their deeds and perhaps they might return to the Right Path*"^{viii}.

The above verse indicates that human moral failures are directly linked with environmental corruption, and Allah warns them through destruction as a taste of their own deeds.

The book of Allah clearly warns the people on the earth that God's creation must be respected by everyone and not harmed by anyone. Classical scholars explained that the excessive behavior of

human beings towards the natural environment can bring severe consequences to the earth.^{ix}

Thus, the nature belongs to Allah, human life and environment must be protected, and exploiting the environment beyond its limit is prohibited in Islam because it leads to an imbalance in the ecosystem.

Prophetic Teachings (Hadith)

In prophetic traditions, environmental protection is further clarified. The Holy Prophet always stressed "Moderation" in every aspect of life. Once, the Holy Prophet saw a companion using excessive water for ablution by a riverside. He said, "Sa'd, what is this squandering?" Sa'd replied: "Can there be an idea of squandering (israf) in ablution?" The Prophet said: "Yes, even if you are by the side of a flowing river."^x

Holy Prophet also drew attention to planting trees and called it ongoing Sadaqah. Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "If the Final Hour comes while you have a shoot of a plant in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it."^{xi}

On environmental sanitation, another Hadith of the Prophet: Reported by Abu Huraira, The Messenger of Allah said: "Be on your guard against two things which provoke cursing. They (the companions present there) said: Messenger of Allah, what are those things which provoke cursing? He said: Easing on the thoroughfares or under the shades (where they take shelter and rest)."^{xii}

A key juristic maxim derived from the above sayings of Holy prophet is La Darar Wa-la Dirar which jurists apply to forbid pollution, deforestation or any environmental harm that afflicts people.

Classical Fiqh and Maqasid al-Shariah

Classical Scholars, while explaining Maqasid al-Shariah, did not address the environment as per modern laws related to the environment and ecology. Among the five objectives of Shariah, including *hifz al-din* (faith), *hifz al-nafs* (life), *hifz al-'aql* (intellect), *hifz al-nasl* (lineage), and *hifz al-mal* (property),^{xiii} the most important is *hifz al-nafs*, which is ultimately linked with *hifz al-biah*. All legal rules aiming at public interest are seen as valid measures to protect these ends. For example, the law of Qisas serves as the objective of *Hifz al-nafs*. By analogy, destroying forests or polluting water (which cause widespread death and illness) runs counter to *hifz al-nafs*.

Modern scholars like Yusuf al-Qaraḍawi have argued that the five maqasid are inherently linked to environmental preservation: protection of life, intellect, lineage, wealth, etc., all of which depend on a sound environment.^{xiv}

He further elaborates that Shariah goals implicitly include the ecological well-being. Classical fiqh and maqasid theory provide a framework where safeguarding human life and resources is paramount, which by extension includes protecting the environment as a trust (*amānah*).

Environmental Challenges in Pakistan

Pakistan is facing numerous environmental challenges that are directly affecting human life. Some of them are

Air pollution (Lahore Smog)

Some cities in Pakistan are facing an alarming situation with air quality. Over the last few decades, air pollution (Both indoor and outdoor) has been affecting human health than ever before, and has become the deadliest form of pollution in the world.^{xv} In 2025, Lahore ranked as the 5th most polluted city with an AQI of 166. In 2024, 70,000 people were admitted to the hospital with respiratory illness due to smog.^{xvi}

Major factors of Lahore's smog are low-grade diesel emissions from vehicles, seasonal agricultural burning, industrial emissions, and a complex mix of pollutants. The World Bank estimates these health damages cost 6.5% of GDP annually. Inhaling polluted air effectively shortens life expectancy by 3.9 years on average (up to 7 years in Lahore). Clearly, these airborne problems are not merely harmful but sometimes killers; they intrude on *hifz al-nafs* by causing chronic disease, disability, and death, especially among children, the elderly, and the poor.

Catastrophic Floods (MoonSoon)

Flood is a natural calamity with integrative impacts, and is directly associated with climate change. With every passing year, the duration, severity, and frequency of floods increase in Pakistan, whether it is a flash flood or a riverine flood.^{xvii} Pakistan is one of those countries that face floods every three years between 1950 and 2025, especially during every monsoon. These floods caused losses of 8887 human

lives and an indirect economic impact of \$19 billion.^{xviii}

The summer 2022 monsoon rains were record-breaking, which highly affected one third of the country. Recently, from 12 to 16 August 2025, due to a cloud burst, one district of KPK, named Buner, and one district of GB, named Gojal, were totally destroyed.

Due to the flood, thousands of people lost their lives. Many lost their home, land, and access to the necessities of life. Millions of acres of crop land were destroyed. The water system collapsed. Children faced severe malnutrition and illness. These floods illustrate how environmental disasters devastate human life exactly what *ḥifẓ al-nafs* seeks to protect. The linkage of glacier melt, rising temperatures, and erratic monsoons to climate change means such events will recur unless mitigated.

Water Pollution and Scarcity:

Another issue faced by Pakistan is polluted water. Clean drinking water is not available even in the big cities of Pakistan. Only 20% of Pakistanis have access to clean water, which is a very alarming situation. 80% of the population lacks access to safe and clean water. Waterborne diseases are gradually rising. Due to sewage leaks, industrial effluents, and agrochemical industries, diarrheal illness, intestinal worms, cryptosporidium infections, cholera, and typhoid-like diseases are increasing. The groundwater supply is the main source of provision in most of the cities of Pakistan; however, it contains various pathogens, including many viral, bacterial, and protozoan agents, causing 2.5 million deaths from endemic diarrheal disease each year.^{xx} The chlorination process is not common in Pakistan. Poor sanitation and outdated infrastructure worsen this; rivers and groundwater in many regions contain coliforms and toxic metals. For example, polluted canals and the Indus River carry pesticide runoff that not only endangers health but also reduces fertile land. The economic burden is huge: diarrhea and malnutrition keep children in a vicious cycle of illness.^{xx} Thus, contaminated water undermines *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (life) and even *ḥifẓ al-'aql* (intellect) through cognitive damage from pollutants.

Deforestation:

The deforestation rate is very high in Pakistan. Deforestation is the removal of existing natural trees. Pakistan's forest cover is shockingly low and declining rapidly. WWF-Pakistan reports an average loss of 11,000 hectares per year due to logging, land conversion, and wildfires. Forests provides carbon storage and other benefits while delivering a lot of environmental and social benefits, such as timber and biomass resources, clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreation. Climate (low rainfall) limits regrowth, while population pressure fuels unsustainable fuel wood and timber harvesting. Forest loss has grave consequences: trees regulate climate and rainfall, prevent landslides and floods, and support rural livelihoods. Deforestation worsened the 2022 floods by reducing natural barriers and soil absorption.^{xxi} WWF notes that conserving forests is both an "environmental imperative" and a social necessity for food security. The Pakistani government's own forest strategy laments that inadequate forest cover aggravates floods, droughts, and carbon emissions (the country ranked most climate-vulnerable in 2022.^{xxii} In sum, deforestation imperils rural life and national food supply, undermining the *amanah* entrusted to Pakistan and the very "sustaining of life" that Islam emphasizes.

Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, Ḥifẓ al-Nafs and Amānah in Environmental Ethics

Maqasid theory places life and public welfare on the top. The Maqasid framework teaches that *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (life) is a primary objective. Preserving human life involves not only preventing murder but also ensuring to give them a safe and secure environment. Thus pollution, which shortens life and degrades health, is contrary to *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. Similarly, *ḥifẓ al-mal* (wealth) can extend to natural resources (forests, water, air) that communities depend on; destroying them would violate public property rights. The concept of *amanah* (trust) from Qur'an 33:72 explicitly charges Muslims with the duty of caring for creation as a sacred trust from Allah. This extends the religious duty to communal environment management.

Several Islamic legal maxims support environmental ethics. The principle *la ḍarar wa-la ḍīrar* (no harm, no reciprocating harm) demands that one may not harm another or oneself – here environmental harm to one

community (e.g. upstream pollution) that then affects downstream people is prohibited. The maxim *Maslahah al-Ummah* (public interest) validates preventive measures like banning open burning or uncontrolled emissions, as these protect the community's health. The Prophet's clear preference for moderation (*wasatiyah*), avoiding *israf* (waste) also translates into eco-mindful behavior – avoiding excess consumption and resource depletion.

Islamic *fiqh* also recognizes that protecting life can override other prohibitions in emergencies (*darura*). For example, if an oil spill or flood leaves people without clean fuel, limited use of otherwise forbidden substances might be allowed to keep people alive, reflecting *hifz al-nafs*. One practical policy corollary: emissions or deforestation activities that endanger thousands could be restricted even if economically beneficial, because the Shariah prioritizes life over material gain (see *maṣlahah* logic in issuance of *hudud* penalties to protect life. In short, an Islamic legal approach would demand that environmental policies serve people's well-being.

Notably, Yusuf al-Qaraḍawi (a prominent modern scholar) explicitly links environmental conservation to the *maqāṣid*: he states that preserving nature is part of protecting life and other Shariah values. He argues that environmental ethics “is always in connection with the *Maqāṣid*” and that humans are *Khalifah* ' on earth responsible for its safety.^{xxiii} Pakistani jurists and scholars of environmental law echo this, asserting that polluting or destroying resources violates Islamic injunctions on transgression (*fasād*) and cruelty (*zulm*).

In practice, these Shariah principles mean: protecting human life by preventing environmental hazards is obligatory; sustainable use of resources is morally required; and environmental degradation is a communal sin unless rectified. This contrasts with a purely secular view that might treat environment as commodity or regulatory issue. In Islam, it is a moral mandate tied to *amanah* and *hifz al-nafs*.

Islamic Ethics vs. Pakistani Environmental Policy

Pakistan has promulgated several environmental laws. PEPA Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997, National Conservation Strategy, Clean Air Act 2014, and Provincial environmental acts and policies (National Environmental Policy, 2005; Clean Air Policy 2023) intended to protect the environment and

control the pollution. These acts align with Shariah for safeguarding life and ecosystem in theory however in practice, enforcement gaps persist.

For example, Pakistan's National Clean Air Policy (2023) commits to Euro-6 fuel standards by 2030, but paradoxically allows a national $PM_{2.5}$ limit of $35 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ seven times above the WHO guideline essentially allowing continued harm.^{xxiv} The report shows that this is weakening public health objectives (and thus *hifz al-nafs*) that Islam would demand strongly.

Similarly forest-protection laws exist, but illegal logging and land encroachment continue with little prosecution. Water pollution rules (NEQS standards) are often unmet, leading to the severe health issues.^{xxv}

The most important and comprehensive act on environmental protection is the The Pakistan Environmental Protection Act, 1997 (PEPA) that established the legal framework for addressing environmental protection in Pakistan. The Act provided a basis for public litigation, empowering NGOs, media, and courts to raise environmental issues.

Pakistan's environmental governance remains weak due to superficial implementation of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), where reviews are rushed and oversight minimal, even in major projects like the Lahore Orange Line and CPEC ventures. Chronic underfunding, limited staff, and weak independence hinder the capacity of federal and provincial Environmental Protection Agencies, while institutional fragmentation after the 18th Amendment has further undermined policy harmonization and inter-agency coordination. Public participation in EIAs is minimal, restricted by language barriers, poor consultation mechanisms, and limited access to data. Moreover, financial tools under PEPA, such as pollution charges and environmental funds, remain largely unimplemented, and enforcement mechanisms lack the comprehensiveness needed for effective regulation.

A Shariah appraisal of PEPA reveals significant gaps between its stated goals and Islamic ethical imperatives. While the Act claims alignment with *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of life) and *amānah* (trusteeship of creation), persistent pollution, weak enforcement, and governance failures undermine these objectives. Such shortcomings violate the principles of *lā ḍarar*

(no harm), disregard *maṣlahah* (public interest), and neglect *hisbah* (public oversight), leaving public health and environmental welfare inadequately protected.

A comparison table of key issues shows these gaps

Table: 1

Issue	Impact on Human Life	Islamic Ethical Imperative	Pakistani Policy Status
Air Pollution (Lahore smog)	70,000 respiratory cases in Nov 2024 alone are recorded in Pakistan ^{xxvi}	Protect life, ban harmful emissions	Clean Air Policy 2023 (target PM2.5=35µg) but WHO=5µg ^{xxvii} ; enforcement weak
Water Contamination	50-80% of illnesses, 33-40% of deaths linked to unsafe water ^{xxviii}	Ensure safe water, prevent harm	Pakistan Environmental Protection Rules (NEQS) exist but largely unenforced; sanitation inadequate, filtration plants not found in all districts
Floods (2022,2025 monsoon)	death tolls reached 1700, 33M affected, millions displaced in 2022 800 dead, 905 injured, villages erased in KPK and GB in 2025	Prevent loss of life, assist victims	National Disaster Management Act in place, but climate adaptation plans underfunded; infrastructure weak, no national early-warning app, no disaster insurance, no real time weather monitoring
Forest Loss	Increases floods/droughts, food insecurity; livelihood loss	Protect nature, prevent harm	Forest policies (2020 National Forest Policy) exist; annual loss 11k hectares ^{xxix} continues due to weak enforcement, timber Mafia

Islamic ethics would demand much stricter measures (preventing harm, redistributive justice) than currently enacted. For example, principles of equity and *adl* (justice) in Islam imply that poor and marginalized communities deserve protection. Pakistan’s policies often address pollution as an industrial or technical issue, whereas an Islamic view would see uncontrolled emissions or unsafe water as violations of citizens’ rights to life.

Despite the fact that Pakistani law nominally includes environmental protection parallel to Shariah’s objectives, implementation gaps mean the essence of *hifz al-nafs* and *amanah* is not fully realized. Aligning policy with Islamic ethics would involve stronger preventive action, transparent monitoring e.g. real-time air quality data, real-time monitoring apps, community engagement mosque-based conservation programs, and enforcement that privileges human health over short-term economic interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(Sharī’ah Consistent Policy Reforms)

a) Strengthening Standards and Enforcement

NEQS (National environment quality standards) should be elevated to match WHO guidelines and policies, with no relaxations, and independent post-EIA audits institutionalized. EPA and PEPA capacity must be enhanced through better staffing, laboratories, and monitoring, while enforcement can be reinforced with day-rate fines and expedited legal processes against repeat offenders.

b) Enhancing Participation and Transparency

Public engagement should be widened by translating EIAs, advertising hearings broadly, and ensuring open publication of environmental data. This fulfills the Sharī’ah principle of *hisbah* (public oversight) and builds trust in regulatory processes.

c) Economic and Institutional Reforms

Pollution charges should be activated and earmarked for community rehabilitation, while incentives for

green procurement can encourage private-sector compliance. Interprovincial coordination is also needed for effective transboundary air and water management.

d) Integrating Ethics and Climate Resilience

Climate resilience must be integrated into PEPA alignment, while Islamic values such as **amanah** (trusteeship) and **maslahah** (public welfare) can be operationalized by embedding environmental ethics into Friday khutbahs and mobilizing waqf initiatives for clean water and green spaces.

CONCLUSION

The Shariah perspective on life and environment provides a comprehensive ethical framework that give instructions to preserve human life by protecting nature. The Qur'an and Sunnah stress *hifz al-nafs* and *amanah* throughout their teachings, commanding humans to be just stewards of creation. In Pakistan, this perspective remains only partially realized: rampant smog, devastating floods, polluted water, and vanishing forests testify to a failure to live up to the "trust" given by Allah. But the same Islamic principles offer guidance: prioritizing public interest (*maslahah*) over profit, enforcing "no harm" (*la darar*), and understanding that caring for the environment is an act of worship.

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Academic and religious sources now increasingly call for Islamic ethics to inform policy. Practical steps could include mosques promoting conservation (as *Green Mosque* initiatives), fatwas encouraging eco-friendly practices, and legislators framing environmental rights as part of citizens' rights to life. Comparatively, current Pakistani environmental regulations, though a start, fall short of the limitations implied by the Shariah: for example, acceptable air pollution levels are set far above what would safeguard children's health.

Ultimately, preserving *nafs* in Pakistan cannot be separated from ecological preservation. Islamic ethics demands that the environment be protected not only for its own sake but because it sustains human life a sacred duty. By explicitly articulating environmental care as part of life-preservation, the Shariah perspective offers moral and legal urge to strengthen Pakistan's response to its environmental crises. Bridging religious values and public policy could mobilize communities and leaders alike: saving a single life from pollution or disaster honors the Quranic ideal and helps ensure the survival and well-being of all.

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^{vi} Al Quran 33:72

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See also al-Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh*, no. 427.

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