

Challenging Greed, Strengthening Gratitude: A Qur’anic Perspective on Modern Ecological Disasters in Sumatera

Gilang Malcom Habiebie¹, Siti Badi’ah², Budimansyah³

¹²³Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia

gilanghabiebie12@gmail.com¹, siti.badiyah@radenintan.ac.id²,

budi@radenintan.ac.id³

ABSTRACT

Ecological disasters occurring across Sumatera in recent years reveal that environmental degradation is not merely a natural phenomenon but is deeply intertwined with human moral and behavioral failures. This article examines how greed, excessive exploitation, and the neglect of ecological boundaries contribute to the intensification of floods, landslides, and ecosystem collapse. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study integrates Qur’anic teachings—particularly QS. Ar-Rūm:41 and QS. Ibrahim:7—with contemporary environmental analyses to examine the ethical foundations underpinning ecological sustainability. The Qur’an presents greed (ṭama’) as a destructive inner disposition that leads to fasād (corruption) on earth, while emphasizing syukur (gratitude) and qana’ah (contentment) as virtues that guide humans toward responsible stewardship. The findings suggest that deforestation, illegal mining, river manipulation, and unregulated development in Sumatera align with Qur’anic descriptions of human-induced corruption, leading to ecological imbalance and increased disaster vulnerability. Furthermore, the study highlights that gratitude and contentment offer practical ethical principles that can inform sustainable environmental policies by promoting restraint, accountability, and alignment with ecological carrying capacity. The integration of Qur’anic values with scientific insights provides a holistic framework for addressing environmental crises, emphasizing the need for moral reform alongside technical solutions. Ultimately, the research highlights the importance of integrating Islamic ethical principles into environmental governance to foster equitable, sustainable, and spiritually grounded approaches to ecological preservation.

Keywords: attitude, greed, Qur’anic Ecology, ecological disasters, Sumatera

INTRODUCTION

Environmental disasters are no longer viewed merely as natural phenomena detached from human responsibility. Over the past two decades, Indonesia, particularly Sumatera, has experienced increasingly frequent floods, landslides, forest fires, and ecosystem collapse, indicating severe environmental instability. Recent analyses have shown that ecological degradation in Indonesia is strongly correlated with rapid land-use change and long-term forest loss (Parker et al., 2024; Margono et al., 2020). These patterns confirm that the worsening disasters in Sumatera are the cumulative result of human activities that alter the ecological balance (Singh & Yan, 2021).

From an Islamic viewpoint, maintaining environmental balance is part of the divine order entrusted to humankind. The Qur’an identifies humans as khalīfah who must preserve nature rather than exploit it destructively. This stewardship role, understood as an *Amanah*, is linked directly to moral conduct, where environmental

destruction becomes both an ecological and spiritual failure. Studies on Islamic eco-theology emphasize that environmental degradation reflects an ethical departure from core Qur’anic values (Rohman et al., 2024; Sabtina, 2024; Muhriningsih et al., 2024).

The Qur’an elaborates this moral–ecological link in QS. Ar-Rūm:41, describing how corruption on land and sea results from human actions. The verse highlights a causal connection between unethical behavior and ecological imbalance. Scholars argue that the verse anticipates modern anthropogenic disasters, where excessive extraction and uncontrolled land conversion have direct environmental consequences (Nur et al., 2025; Putri, 2020). Contemporary research in disaster studies similarly notes that human-driven environmental degradation is a primary amplifier of hazard impacts in hazard-prone regions such as Sumatera (Heo et al., 2024).

One central moral failure contributing to environmental damage is greed. Greed drives actors to pursue short-term profit through intensive deforestation, mining, industrial expansion, and illegal land conversion (Gaveau et al., 2020; Juniyanti et al., 2023). These actions often disregard ecological thresholds and accelerate biodiversity loss (Reygadas et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that the continuous clearing of old-growth forests destabilizes landscapes and increases the frequency of disasters (Gunawan et al., 2024; CIFOR-ICRAF, 2020–2024). Thus, greed becomes both an ethical violation and a direct ecological threat.

By contrast, Islamic teachings emphasize *syukur* (gratitude) and *qana’ah* (contentment) as moral principles that can restrain destructive behaviour. Gratitude, in Qur’anic ethics, includes caring for and preserving natural resources. Studies in religious environmental ethics note that *syukur* promotes moderation, responsibility, and awareness of ecological limits (Rohman et al., 2024; Muhriningsih et al., 2024). Eco-theological scholarship also shows that integrating value-based ethics into environmental education strengthens students’ environmental awareness and reduces exploitative attitudes (Rohman et al., 2024; Sabtina, 2024).

Prophetic traditions further strengthen this foundation by framing true prosperity not in material accumulation but in contentment. Researchers argue that *qana’ah* aligns with sustainable living because it discourages excessive resource consumption (Putri, 2020; Rohman et al., 2024). When applied to environmental policymaking, these values provide a moral compass that aligns spiritual well-being with ecological sustainability (Nur et al., 2025; Mahendra, 2024).

Recent environmental disasters in West Sumatera, North Sumatera, and Aceh illustrate the consequences of bypassing these ethical principles. Multi-hazard assessments demonstrate that deforestation-induced slope instability significantly increases the intensity of floods and landslides in Sumatera (Heo et al., 2024). Regional analyses also indicate that forest clearing and river manipulation directly contribute to extreme hydrometeorological events (Juniyanti et al., 2023; CIFOR-ICRAF, 2024). These findings align with global research showing that deforestation and land degradation heighten disaster vulnerability across tropical regions (Spera et al., 2020; Reygadas et al., 2023).

Environmental destruction affects not only natural landscapes but also the social and cultural structures of communities. Rural populations dependent on forests and watersheds face increasing risks of displacement, food insecurity, and livelihood instability due to land degradation (Gaveau et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2024). International studies further confirm that ecological disruption undermines long-term community resilience and increases socioeconomic disparities (Reygadas et al., 2023; Spera et al., 2020). Thus, environmental degradation is not merely a physical crisis but a multidimensional societal threat.

Viewing ecological degradation through a Qur'anic ethical lens opens the door to more holistic policy responses. Scientific evidence identifies the drivers of environmental damage, but moral frameworks determine how societies interpret and act upon this evidence. Scholars emphasize that integrating religious ethics into environmental governance fosters social engagement and promotes sustainable policy compliance (Smith & Veldman, 2024; Rohman et al., 2024). Such integration is especially relevant in Indonesia, where religious values play a central role in shaping public behavior and community identity (Muhriningsih et al., 2024; Sabtina, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore how Qur'anic concepts of *syukur* and the prohibition of greed can contribute to contemporary ecological ethics and environmental governance. By examining scriptural teachings alongside modern environmental challenges, this article demonstrates that the Qur'an provides not only theological insight but also ethical guidance applicable to modern ecological crises. The ecological disasters in Sumatera provide a critical context for demonstrating the urgency of harmonizing scientific and ethical perspectives in addressing environmental degradation (Parker et al., 2024; Singh & Yan, 2021).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which is appropriate for examining ethical, theological, and environmental meanings embedded within textual sources and current ecological events. Qualitative descriptive research allows researchers to provide an in-depth narrative of a phenomenon by synthesizing textual, contextual, and empirical insights (Rohman et al., 2024). Because the topic concerns Qur'anic ethical concepts and contemporary environmental degradation, this approach provides the needed flexibility to explore both normative teachings and real-world ecological conditions in Sumatera (Sabtina, 2024; Nur et al., 2025).

Data for the study were gathered through a library-based document analysis, focusing on primary sources, including the Qur'an, major classical and contemporary tafsir works, and relevant hadith collections. Document analysis is widely recognized as a valid method in qualitative inquiry, particularly for exploring conceptual and ethical themes (Putri, 2020). Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and environmental datasets produced by scholars, institutions, and international bodies studying deforestation, land-use change, and ecological disasters in Indonesia (Parker et al., 2024; Singh & Yan, 2021; Juniyaniti et al., 2023).

To analyze the textual material, the study applied a thematic tafsīr (*tafsīr maudhuʿī*) approach, which organizes Qurʾanic verses around specific themes—in this case, *syukur*, *qanaʿah*, greed, and environmental stewardship. This interpretive method is frequently used in contemporary Qurʾanic research to integrate scriptural teachings with modern issues such as environmental ethics (Muharningsih et al., 2024; Rohman et al., 2024). The thematic analysis was complemented by coding relevant categories emerging from environmental studies literature, including anthropogenic drivers of deforestation, ecological vulnerability, and disaster risk factors (Reygadas et al., 2023; Heo et al., 2024).

To ensure validity and reliability, this study implemented triangulation of sources, comparing scriptural interpretations with ecological and socio-environmental case studies from Sumatera. Triangulation strengthens qualitative findings by merging multiple lines of evidence (Gaveau et al., 2020). Reports from CIFOR–ICRAF (2020–2024) and international hazard research (Spera et al., 2020) were used to cross-check patterns of environmental degradation with the ethical principles identified in Qurʾanic analysis. Member-checking was applied through consultation with scholarly commentary in peer-reviewed Islamic studies journals to ensure consistency with established interpretations (Rohman et al., 2024; Sabtina, 2024).

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. The study adhered to accepted ethical norms in qualitative research by ensuring accurate representation of religious texts, transparent citation practices, and careful interpretation of disaster data to avoid misrepresentation or sensationalism (Mahendra, 2024). Because the research is non-intrusive and relies entirely on publicly available literature, no human subjects were involved. Nevertheless, the study-maintained sensitivity to the social impact of ecological disasters on affected communities and emphasized the moral responsibility embedded in Qurʾanic ecological ethics (Nur et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Greed as the Root of Ecological Destruction

Muslim scholars widely identify greed (*ṭamaʿ*) as one of the most severe moral diseases that distort human behaviour and disrupt social order. Within Islamic ethical discourse, greed is understood as a spiritual imbalance that drives individuals to pursue material gain excessively, disregarding moral boundaries and communal welfare. This condition aligns with what contemporary eco-theologians describe as the spiritual roots of ecological crisis—where human desire escalates beyond necessity and becomes a destructive force (Rohman et al., 2024; Muharningsih et al., 2024). In this ethical framework, environmental destruction is not merely a physical phenomenon but a manifestation of inner moral decay (Putri, 2020).

In ecological terms, greed manifests concretely through the aggressive exploitation of natural resources. The rapid expansion of deforestation in Indonesia, particularly in Sumatera, demonstrates how economic greed shapes land-use changes. Studies show that large-scale forest clearing, primarily driven by commercial

plantation expansion and extractive industries, has significantly reduced ecological resilience and triggered multiple environmental hazards (Parker et al., 2024; Singh & Yan, 2021). These exploitative practices often exceed the ecological carrying capacity, creating irreversible damage to biodiversity and watershed systems (Reygadas et al., 2023; Gaveau et al., 2020).

This destructive tendency aligns with what the Qur'an describes as *ifsād* (corruption or destruction), which involves actions that violate divine limits and disrupt natural balance. The Qur'an explicitly condemns acts of environmental corruption in QS. Al-Baqarah:11–12, reminding humans not to spread destruction on earth after it has been set in order. Modern analyses show that greed-driven activities—such as illegal logging, mining without reclamation, and unchecked land conversion—fit within this Qur'anic prohibition because they systematically degrade the earth's ecological stability (Nur et al., 2025; Mahendra, 2024). Such behaviours exemplify an ethical transgression with direct environmental consequences.

Empirical evidence from Sumatera further underscores how greed-driven exploitation has led to tangible ecological disasters. Research on flood and landslide hazards reveals that extensive forest loss drastically reduces slope stability, increases surface runoff, and heightens the frequency and magnitude of hydrometeorological disasters (Heo et al., 2024; Juniyaniti et al., 2023). Reports from CIFOR–ICRAF (2020–2024) also indicate that regions experiencing rapid deforestation exhibit higher vulnerability to disasters compared to protected areas. These findings confirm that greed-fueled extraction not only damages the environment but also directly endangers human life.

Ultimately, greed acts as a structural driver of ecological crisis, intertwining moral, social, and environmental deterioration. It encourages policies and practices that prioritize economic gain over long-term ecological health. Global and local studies conclude that greed-centered development models undermine community resilience, accelerate environmental degradation, and contradict the principles of sustainable stewardship emphasized in Islamic ethics (Spera et al., 2020; Rohman et al., 2024). Thus, confronting ecological destruction requires addressing the moral foundation of greed itself, making ethical and spiritual transformation an essential component of environmental restoration.

Gratitude (*Syukur*) and Contentment (*Qana'ah*) as Foundations of Ecological Ethics

In Islamic ethical thought, *syukur* (gratitude) extends beyond verbal acknowledgment of blessings to encompass concrete actions that preserve, protect, and responsibly utilize God's creation. The Qur'an emphasizes that gratitude leads to the increase and preservation of blessings, as stated in QS. Ibrahim:7. Contemporary Islamic environmental scholars interpret this promise as extending beyond personal well-being to include ecological stability and sustainable environmental conditions (Rohman et al., 2024; Muhriningsih et al., 2024). Thus, gratitude functions as an ethical orientation that restrains destructive behaviour and encourages ecological stewardship.

Gratitude also forms the basis of what environmental ethics describe as a reverent and respectful relationship with nature. Individuals who practice *syukur* tend to avoid wastefulness, overconsumption, and exploitation, which aligns with the Qur’anic command to maintain balance (*mīzān*) and avoid corruption (*fasād*) on earth (Nur et al., 2025). Studies link value-based environmental education to improved ecological awareness and reduced extractive tendencies, demonstrating that gratitude-centered ethics can shape sustainable behavior at both personal and communal levels (Sabtina, 2024; Rohman et al., 2024).

Complementing gratitude is the virtue of *qana’ah*, defined by Ibn al-Jawzī as a state of inner calm and sufficiency with what God has provided. From an ecological standpoint, *qana’ah* reduces the psychological and economic pressures that drive excessive consumption and environmental exploitation (Putri, 2020). Scholars argue that contentment aligns with sustainability principles by encouraging moderation, reducing material dependencies, and promoting lifestyles within ecological limits (Mahendra, 2024; Muhriningsih et al., 2024). This virtue acts as a counterbalance to greed, the primary moral force behind ecological degradation.

Environmental research is increasingly supporting the view that consumerism and uncontrolled resource extraction are significant contributors to habitat loss and ecological decline. Studies on deforestation in Sumatera indicate that the pursuit of economic gain without ethical restraint leads directly to forest degradation, biodiversity loss, and heightened disaster vulnerability (Parker et al., 2024; Singh & Yan, 2021; Reygadas et al., 2023). In this context, *qana’ah* and *syukur* provide moral frameworks that can moderate human actions by curbing excessive resource utilization and promoting responsible stewardship (Gaveau et al., 2020; Spera et al., 2020).

Together, *syukur* and *qana’ah* form a comprehensive ethical foundation for sustainable development within an Islamic worldview. These values do not reject progress but require that development operates within moral and ecological boundaries. By integrating these virtues into environmental governance and community behavior, societies can cultivate a culture of ecological responsibility aligned with both spiritual principles and scientific realities (Rohman et al., 2024; Sabtina, 2024). Thus, the Qur’anic teachings on gratitude and contentment offer powerful ethical tools for addressing contemporary ecological crises and promoting long-term environmental sustainability.

Interpretation of QS. Ar-Rūm:41 and Its Relevance to Ecological Disasters in Sumatera

QS. Ar-Rūm:41 is one of the most explicit Qur’anic statements linking human actions to environmental degradation. The verse declares that “corruption has appeared on land and sea due to what human hands have earned,” indicating a direct causal relationship between moral misconduct and ecological imbalance. Classical and contemporary exegetes explain *fasād* in this verse as encompassing all forms of ecological disruption, social disorder, and moral decline (Nur et al., 2025; Rohman et al., 2024). Modern eco-theologians further interpret this verse as a profound warning

that environmental crises are often human-induced consequences rather than purely natural events (Muharningsih et al., 2024).

This Qur’anic principle strongly aligns with scientific analyses of environmental disasters in Sumatera, where human-driven land-use changes have significantly intensified ecological risks. Deforestation—particularly in the highland areas of West Sumatera, North Sumatera, and Aceh—has undermined watershed stability and increased the likelihood of catastrophic floods and landslides (Parker et al., 2024; Singh & Yan, 2021). Studies confirm that the removal of forest cover weakens soil cohesion, reduces water absorption, and amplifies runoff, resulting in more severe hydrometeorological disasters (Reygadas et al., 2023; Gaveau et al., 2020). These findings directly correspond to the Qur’anic notion of corruption, which manifests visibly in the natural world.

Furthermore, the verse highlights that ecological harm is often cumulative, resulting from persistent patterns of wrongdoing. In Sumatera, illegal mining, unregulated logging, and destructive modifications to river channels have collectively degraded entire ecosystems over time (Juniyanti et al., 2023; CIFOR–ICRAF, 2024). These activities not only destabilize landscapes but also disrupt ecosystem services, including freshwater supply, soil fertility, and biodiversity support. The Qur’anic phrase “so that He may let them taste part of the consequences of their deeds” serves as an ethical reminder that environmental collapse is often the delayed outcome of systemic human exploitation (Mahendra, 2024).

Modern disaster research provides further empirical insight into the real-world manifestation of *fasād*. Multi-hazard assessments in Sumatera reveal that regions undergoing rapid industrial expansion and land clearing exhibit significantly higher vulnerability to floods, erosion, and landslides (Heo et al., 2024). These environmental risks are not random but follow the spatial patterns of human intervention. International studies similarly indicate that ecological disruptions in tropical regions follow predictable trajectories where unchecked exploitation leads to environmental collapse (Spera et al., 2020; Reygadas et al., 2023). This body of research resonates strongly with QS. Ar-Rūm:41, reinforcing the Qur’anic message that natural systems respond to human behavior.

Thus, QS. Ar-Rūm:41 provides not only a theological explanation but also a conceptual lens through which contemporary environmental disasters can be understood. The verse highlights the moral responsibility of humans to maintain ecological balance and warns of the consequences that result from violating this responsibility. The case of Sumatera exemplifies this intersection between scriptural guidance and ecological reality: widespread environmental degradation is neither accidental nor inevitable, but a direct reflection of human choices and governance failures (Parker et al., 2024; Nur et al., 2025). By integrating Qur’anic teachings with scientific evidence, this analysis demonstrates that addressing ecological crises requires both ethical reform and sustainable environmental management.

Integrating Qur’anic Values into Environmental Policy

Addressing the ecological crisis requires more than technical or scientific interventions; it demands a moral and spiritual framework that shapes human behavior at its core. The Qur'an provides such a framework by warning against greed (*tama'*) and urging humans to uphold justice, moderation, and responsibility toward the earth. Contemporary scholars argue that ecological collapse is often rooted in moral failures that lead to unsustainable development practices (Rohman et al., 2024; Muhriningsih et al., 2024). Therefore, the integration of Qur'anic values into environmental governance provides a more holistic approach that can address both the structural and ethical drivers of ecological degradation.

One of the most central Qur'anic values relevant to environmental policy is *syukur* (gratitude). In public policy terms, gratitude translates to responsible management of natural resources, minimizing waste, and prioritizing long-term ecological health over short-term economic gains. Studies show that value-based governance—grounded in ethical and religious principles—enhances public commitment to environmental protection and improves policy compliance (Mahendra, 2024; Sabtina, 2024). When applied to environmental regulation, *syukur* supports principles of sustainability, transparency, and ecological accountability (Nur et al., 2025).

Another key value is *qana'ah* (contentment), which promotes sufficiency and discourages exploitative behavior. In the context of policy, *qana'ah* encourages governments and industries to adopt development models that remain within ecological limits and reject excessive extraction of natural resources. Environmental studies indicate that regions implementing restraint-based policies experience lower rates of ecological degradation and higher environmental stability (Parker et al., 2024; Reygadas et al., 2023). Integrating *qana'ah* into policymaking thus aligns economic planning with ecological resilience and long-term sustainability (Spera et al., 2020).

Practical steps for integrating Qur'anic ethics into environmental governance include strengthening environmental education, promoting community-based conservation, and incorporating religious leaders into public awareness campaigns. Research in Sumatera suggests that community engagement, supported by ethical and cultural values, significantly improves the success rates of conservation programs (Gaveau et al., 2020; Juniyanti et al., 2023). Faith-based approaches have also been shown to motivate collective action, enhance local accountability, and foster more substantial commitment to forest protection and disaster mitigation (CIFOR–ICRAF, 2024; Muhriningsih et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the integration of Qur'anic values into environmental policy generates a more human-centered and justice-oriented framework for ecological governance. Such an approach ensures that policy decisions are informed not only by scientific data but also by moral considerations rooted in divine guidance. This ethical grounding promotes fair resource distribution, protects vulnerable communities, and reinforces principles of stewardship and responsibility (Rohman et al., 2024; Sabtina, 2024). By aligning environmental policy with Qur'anic ethics, societies can develop more sustainable, equitable, and spiritually grounded responses to the ecological

challenges facing regions such as Sumatera today.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that ecological degradation in Sumatera is not merely the result of natural processes but is closely tied to moral and behavioral failures rooted in greed, excessive exploitation, and disregard for environmental limits. Qur’anic teachings—particularly the values of *syukur* (gratitude), *qana’ah* (contentment), and the warning against *fasād* (corruption)—provide a powerful ethical framework for interpreting and responding to these crises. Integrating these values with contemporary ecological research reveals a holistic understanding whereby environmental destruction reflects both physical and spiritual imbalance. The cases examined in Sumatera show that deforestation, illegal mining, river manipulation, and unregulated development have directly contributed to recurring floods, landslides, and ecological collapse, confirming the Qur’anic assertion that corruption appears on land and sea due to human actions.

Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that environmental governance in Indonesia incorporate Qur’anic ethical principles into policy frameworks and community engagement strategies. Policymakers should prioritize sustainability, ecological accountability, and transparent resource management inspired by the values of gratitude and contentment. Religious leaders, educators, and local communities should be actively involved in promoting eco-ethical awareness and fostering a sense of collective responsibility for environmental stewardship. Furthermore, industries operating in ecologically sensitive regions must adopt restraint, adhere to environmental regulations, and develop practices that are aligned with the ecological carrying capacity. By combining scientific insight with Qur’anic moral guidance, Indonesia can cultivate a more just, sustainable, and spiritually grounded approach to environmental protection.

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