

# **Ethical Leadership in Comparative Perspective: King Aśoka's and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's Governance Models for Buddhist-Muslim Engagement**

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## **Abstract**

*This study explores shared ethical paradigms between Buddhism and Islam through the governance of King Aśoka and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, both renowned for their commitment to justice, compassion, and inclusivity. Aśoka prioritized non-violence, religious tolerance, and public welfare through Dhamma, while 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, known as the "Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph," upheld equity and social justice based on Islamic principles. Their approaches offer valuable lessons for Sri Lanka in addressing intercommunal challenges, promoting unity, and achieving sustainable development. Using qualitative research, this study highlights the universal relevance of ethical governance for fostering harmony and equity in pluralistic societies.*

**Keywords:** *Buddhist-Muslim Understanding, King Asoka, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, Good Governance, Intercommunal Harmony, Sri Lanka*

## **Introduction**

Sri Lanka is a nation defined by its vibrant cultural and religious diversity. With its multi-religious and multi-ethnic fabric, the country embodies both the potential for unity and the challenges of maintaining harmony among its communities. Throughout its history, this diversity has been both a source of strength and a trigger for conflict. Historically, Sri Lanka has faced significant socio-political challenges, including ethnic tensions, socio-economic inequalities, and the need for effective governance that upholds justice, inclusivity, and compassion. Against this backdrop, the ethical principles found in both Buddhism and Islam offer valuable insights into fostering a more harmonious and equitable society.

The challenges faced by Sri Lanka are complex and significantly impact good governance and intercommunal harmony in the country. Thirty years of civil war, political instability, and other issues have posed serious obstacles to society and the nation-building process in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan civil war, which lasted from 1983 to 2009, was primarily fought between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), resulting in approximately 80,000 to 100,000 deaths and significant displacement of populations (Senanayake, 2024). The Civil War was rooted in deep-seated ethnic and religious tensions, primarily between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, exacerbated by colonial legacies and post-independence policies that favoured Sinhalese nationalism (A. Sarjoon & Hussin, 2016). (Ganguly, 2018), (Stone, 2011), (Nieto, 2008). Thus, while the war has officially ended, the journey towards genuine peace and acceptance continues to face significant hurdles towards better Sri Lanka. During the Sri Lankan civil war, the Muslim community played a unique role, coexisting with both Tamil and

Sinhala populations and contributing to the country's diverse societal fabric.

However, the end of the civil war in 2009 marked the beginning of significant shifts in the socio-political landscape. A surge in nationalist movements brought about a new wave of ethno-religious tensions, with Muslims increasingly being portrayed as a common enemy (A. Sarjoon & Hussin, 2016). This portrayal intensified following the tragic Easter Sunday bombings in 2019, which further heightened suspicion and anti-Muslim sentiments (A. R. M. Imtiyaz, 2020). These developments have left the Muslim community grappling with isolation, mistrust, and a sense of vulnerability within the broader national framework. So, Muslims in Sri Lanka face significant challenges stemming from a complex interplay of socio-political dynamics, particularly post-civil war resulting dominant extremist ideology positions Muslims as "others," (Schonthal, 2016) fostering anti-Muslim sentiments and violence, notably since 2014, when ethnic unrest escalated, often fuelled by extremists (Fouz et al., 2024). It has been observed that, following the civil war, there is a growing tendency to foster unrest and mutual suspicion between Muslims and Buddhists, which poses a significant threat to the nation-building process and efforts to promote inter-community engagement in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, ethical governance, rooted in values such as justice, compassion, and inclusivity, is critical for addressing the challenges of a pluralistic society like Sri Lanka. These principles transcend religious boundaries and provide a universal framework for building trust and unity among diverse communities while there are religious and cultural differences. So, this article seeks to explore how the ethical leadership and governance practices of two historical figures—King Aśoka of India and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the "Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph" of Islam—provide relevant lessons for Sri Lanka today. Both leaders are revered for their commitment to values that

transcend religious boundaries, demonstrating that ethical governance can be a unifying force in diverse societies.

Sri Lanka, a nation of rich cultural and religious diversity, faces persistent challenges in fostering unity among its Buddhist and Muslim communities. Despite living as equal citizens, mutual misconceptions often strain their relationship—many Buddhists view Muslims as outsiders or others, while Muslims sometimes perceive Buddhists as discriminatory (Schonthal, 2016). These tensions undermine the nation's efforts toward sustainable development and harmony. Addressing this divide requires a paradigm shift grounded in shared ethical values and historical precedents of inclusive governance. The legacies of King Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, despite being separated by time and context, offer profound insights into fostering unity and nation-building. Both leaders, as rulers and spiritual figures, championed justice, compassion, and equality, transcending sectarian boundaries to unify their diverse populations.

This study explores the shared ethical paradigms of Buddhism and Islam—principles such as compassion, non-violence, justice, and social welfare—as a foundation for governance and inter-communal harmony. By drawing lessons from the governance models of Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, it seeks to provide actionable strategies for addressing contemporary challenges in Sri Lanka. The choice of these leaders reflects their dual legacy as remarkable rulers and spiritual icons, whose leadership was universally respected within their religious traditions. Their approaches exemplify how religion-informed leadership can foster inclusivity and shared citizenship, offering valuable guidance for uniting Buddhists and Muslims in building a harmonious nation. Promoting this understanding is not just essential for peace but also for ensuring that both communities collaborate as equal partners in rebuilding Sri Lanka’s future.

It is known that Buddhism and Islam teach middle path (*Majjima Patipada* and *Ummatan Wasatan*) (A. Imtiyaz, 2020), avoid extremism and encourage peaceful coexistence (Ashath, 2021) and

social cohesion (Ashath & Aroos, 2022) that lead to nation-building and inter-communal harmony that leads their followers not to be trouble for themselves, and their societies and both proclaim peace. Although Islam and Buddhism are against violence, the meetings of Buddhist and Muslims sometimes portrays them as violent confrontations in the modern world (Ashath, 2021). Indeed, the works on Buddhist-Muslim conflicts point out the need for better interreligious understanding between Buddhists and Muslims to rebuild their relationship.

Therefore, it is worthy to reexamine the works of Benjamin Schonthal (Schonthal & Walton, 2016), and James John Stewart (Stewart, 2014) <sup>1</sup> on Buddhist-Muslim unrest to rebuild the relationship and remove misconception. Nirmal Ranjith explains majoritarian aspirations towards minorities that explains the allegations against Muslims, such as their behaviour and cultural practices, have fuelled negative perceptions among Sinhala-Buddhists, contributing to unrest (Dewasiri, 2016). While Buddhist-Muslim interactions are often portrayed as violent in the popular imagination, research reveals a more complex history spanning over a millennium across Asia. These encounters have involved artistic, cultural, economic, and intellectual exchanges alongside conflict (Elverskog, 2019). So, the dominant view of inherent confrontation between Buddhism and Islam is challenged by studies exploring diverse engagements in Southeast Asia and Japan (Obuse, 2024). Similarly Obuse's recent work, *Buddhism and Islam: Mutual Engagements in Southeast Asia and Japan*, provides a comprehensive exploration of the historical and cultural interactions between these two major world religions. The study delves into the dynamics of their relationships, highlighting how mutual exchanges and engagements have shaped societies in these regions over centuries. Obuse emphasizes the value of these interactions in fostering understanding, cooperation, and

coexistence between Buddhist and Muslim communities (Obuse, 2024).

The research sheds light on shared ethical principles, cultural adaptations, and collaborative efforts that bring engagements that have contributed to social harmony and mutual enrichment. By examining these historical precedents, the work underscores the potential of Buddhism and Islam to coexist and collaborate in addressing contemporary challenges in multi-religious societies. Additionally, two Buddhist-Muslim dialogue sessions make good interreligious understanding among these two religions. First, the work of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda and Dr. Majid Tehranian, is a prime example of inter-religious dialogue (Tehranian & Ikeda, 2003). Secondly, the dialogue of Abdul Rahman Wahid or Gus Dur (1940–2009) with Daisaku Ikeda (Ikeda & Wahid, 2015) which covers meetings between Buddhist and Islamic civilizations from the 7th century to the present, and their shared similarities.

Yet, these dialogues only cover more general views or common values of all religions, yet it does not focus on any specific textual clarifications which promote social cohesion among the adherents. In contrast, the works of Snjezana Veljacic Akpınar on Buddhist Meditations on Islamic Contemplative Paths: Less Travelled Roads and Abandoned Junctions (Veljačić-Akpınar, 2016), Alexander Berzin's study on Buddhist-Muslim Doctrinal Relations (Berzin, 2008) and the works of Imtiyaz Yousuf (Yusuf, 2015) and the book on Buddhism and Islam: Coexistence and Social Cohesion (Ashath & Aroos, 2022) include some unique ideas which promote good interreligious understanding between Muslim and Buddhists.

So, the studies on Buddhist-Muslim understanding are crucial for fostering harmony in Sri Lanka, a nation where historical and contemporary incidents have often deepened mistrust between these two communities. Overcoming such tensions is essential for building a prosperous and unified country. The leadership principles of King Aśoka and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz provide valuable insights into

promoting justice, inclusivity, and mutual respect. Both leaders, celebrated for their ethical governance, demonstrated how values rooted in compassion, fairness, and accountability can transcend religious boundaries and foster unity among diverse communities. Their examples serve as a timeless framework for addressing inter-communal challenges and cultivating reconciliation.

Consequently, no studies have been carried out that provide advantages for both leaders and citizens in order to create a thriving nation. Such mutual engagement is vital for creating a shared vision of national unity and inter-communal harmony. By examining the leadership of Aśoka and Abdul Aziz, this study identifies practical lessons for shaping Sri Lanka's future, encouraging Buddhists and Muslims alike to draw inspiration from these leaders' legacies hence there is no such study has been conducted.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing content analysis as the methodological tool. Employing a library-based analysis the study adopts a descriptive framework that focuses on distinct aspects of the subject matter. The findings are systematically compiled and structured to explore Buddhist-Muslim understanding, emphasizing shared ethical paradigms. These shared values are examined for their potential contribution to fostering nation-building, peace, and harmony in the contexts where Buddhists and Muslims coexist as equal citizens.

## **King Aśoka's Contributions To Governance**

### **Historical Context**

Aśoka, the grandson and second successor of Chandragupta, who founded the Mauryan dynasty around 324 B.C., played a key role in expanding the empire. While there is limited evidence about Chandragupta's conquests and even less about his son Bindusara's activities, it is believed that Chandragupta's empire already spanned

northern India and covered about two-thirds of the subcontinent. Bindusara and Aśoka further extended the empire southward. The capital was Pataliputra (modern-day Patna), established as Magadha's capital shortly after the Buddha's death (Seneviratna, 1994a). Aśoka, the last major emperor of the Mauryan dynasty, reigned from approximately 265 to 238 BCE. His rule is noted for the promotion of Buddhism and the concept of "*dharma*" following his remorse over the bloody conquest of Kalinga. Aśoka's transformation led him to adopt nonviolence and ethical governance, which he communicated through rock and pillar edicts across his empire (*Britannica.Com*, n.d.). The name "*Ashoka*" literally means "without sorrow." According to an *Ashokavadana* legend, his mother gave him this name because his birth removed her sorrows (Strong, 1989). He is a pivotal figure in Indian history and Buddhism. After a brutal war against Kalinga, Asoka converted to Buddhism and adopted a policy of nonviolence and righteousness. His reign is primarily known through rock edicts and inscriptions, which reflect his Buddhist worldview and efforts to create a just government (Embree, 1961).

These edicts, inscribed on stone, articulated his understanding of dharma, emphasizing moral virtues like honesty, compassion, and nonviolence. Aśoka's policies included respect for all religious sects and efforts to improve public welfare, such as building hospitals and planting trees. His support for Buddhism was instrumental in its spread across India and beyond, including sending missionaries to Sri Lanka. Aśoka's legacy is marked by his efforts to integrate ethical governance with statecraft, leaving a lasting impact on Indian history and Buddhism's global reach (*Britannica.Com*, n.d.). Asoka used Buddhism as a means of political and moral integration of his empire, leveraging a broader movement of social and spiritual change (Thapar, 1958).

Aśoka left a large number of inscriptions on rocks and pillars. He dictated his edicts to scribes in *Paṭaliputta* and had them carved in conspicuous places throughout his vast kingdom (Seneviratna,



1994a). While historical studies focus on these edicts, the *Asokavadana*, a Sanskrit text from the 2nd century CE, provides legendary accounts of Asoka's life and reign. This text offers additional insights into Asoka's significance in Buddhist tradition and complements the archaeological evidence, enriching our understanding of this influential ruler and his impact on Buddhism's spread (Richman, 1986). However, the objectives of Ashoka's inscriptions were to promote Dhamma (righteousness) and moral teachings within society. These inscriptions conveyed the king's instructions on ethical principles, aimed at ensuring happiness in both this life and the next. Key teachings included abstaining from killing living beings, showing obedience to parents, treating relatives and elders with respect, and demonstrating reverence toward Brahmins and ascetics. To propagate these values, Ashoka appointed Dhammamahamatras to engage with various social groups (Medhācitto et al., 2024).

There are limited works about King Asoka, yet the work titled "King Aśoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies," edited by Anuradha Seneviratna is a comprehensive work that discusses the significant transformation of Aśoka, from a military leader to a promoter of Buddhism, emphasizing his role in the peaceful spread of the religion across Asia. The collection includes essays from prominent scholars analyzing Aśoka's inscriptions, the discrepancies between Buddhist traditions and historical accounts, and Aśoka's influence on the emergence of Buddhism as a global religion. Key contributors include Richard Gombrich, Romila Thapar, and Ananda W.P. Guruge, among others, who bring diverse insights into Aśoka's legacy and his ethical governance (Seneviratna, 1994a). The publication is seen as relevant to discussions about the intersection of politics and spirituality today. Similarly, information about Ashoka comes from his inscriptions, other inscriptions that mention him or are possibly from his reign, and ancient literature, especially Buddhist texts (Thapar, 1958). Oliver's edited work is important to analyse Asoka's image (Olivelle et al., 2012). However, these sources often

contradict each other, although various historians have attempted to correlate their testimony (Singh, 2012).

Aśoka's history exists in multiple languages, including Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and others, and can be traced to two main traditions. The North Indian tradition, preserved in Sanskrit texts such as the *Divyavadana* (including the *Ashokavadana*) and Chinese sources like *A-yü wang chuan* and *A-yü wang ching*, offers one perspective (Strong, 1994). This tradition focuses on events like the story of Ashoka's son but does not mention key Buddhist milestones such as the Third Buddhist Council. The Sri Lankan tradition, found in Pali texts such as the *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa*, and the commentaries of Buddhaghosha, provides a different view. It highlights Ashoka's role in convening the Third Buddhist Council and sending missionaries, including his son Mahinda, to Sri Lanka (Strong, 1994).

### **Ethical Rulership And Nation Building: The Legacy Of Aśoka**

Aśoka played a pivotal role in the unification of India and the establishment of a vast empire. His transformation from a military leader to a proponent of ethical governance greatly influenced the structure and stability of the nation (Seneviratna, 1994a). His reign is often cited as a model of good governance, where he focused on the welfare of his subjects, referred to them as "his children," and prioritized their happiness and peace. Aśoka instituted numerous reforms, including the abolition of the death penalty and the establishment of welfare measures, such as building wells and planting shade trees (Seneviratna, 1994a). These actions were aimed at establishing a righteous state based on ethical conduct and well-being.

### **Transformational Leadership:**

After his conquest of Kalinga, Aśoka underwent a profound transformation, leading to a commitment to non-violence and ethical governance. His edicts reveal a shift from military expansionism to a focus on moral conduct and the welfare of his people (Seneviratna,

1994a). Asoka's leadership style was transformative, marked by a significant shift from aggressive to a firm commitment to Buddhism. His reign is noted for substantial efforts in establishing monasteries and propagating Buddhist teachings (Malalasekera, 2012).

### **Dharma as Governance:**

Asoka's concept of **Dharma** became the cornerstone of his rule. He aimed to establish a kingdom where ethical principles governed both personal conduct and state policies. His edicts highlighted the importance of compassion, truthfulness, and non-injury to all living beings (Seneviratna, 1994b). Asoka's governance was fundamentally ethical, aligning his policies with Buddhist principles. This included his commitment to the welfare of people, promotion of righteousness, and ethical administration in the state (Malalasekera, 2012).

### **Social Welfare Initiatives:**

He initiated numerous social welfare programs, such as building hospitals, planting trees along roads, and establishing rest houses for travellers. These programs were aimed at improving the quality of life for his subjects and fostering a sense of community and belonging (Seneviratna, 1994b). His projects sought to enhance the quality of life for all subjects within his empire (Malalasekera, 2012).

### **Judicial Reforms:**

Asoka emphasized the importance of impartiality in justice. He instructed his officials to be fair and just, minimizing harsh penalties and ensuring that sentences were aligned with ethical standards (Seneviratna, 1994b). His approach aimed to create a just society where all individuals, regardless of their status, were treated equitably. These reforms aimed to create a more just legal system that aligned with ethical conduct (Malalasekera, 2012).

### **Promotion of Religious Tolerance:**

Aśoka's policies promoted coexistence among various religious communities. He ordered his officials to extend his patronage to different sects, demonstrating his belief in respect for diverse belief systems as fundamental to a harmonious society (Seneviratna, 1994b). This helped mitigate sectarian strife and fostered unity in the empire. Aśoka is known for his advocacy of religious tolerance, as indicated by his support for all religions. Asoka was known for promoting religious tolerance—not solely for Buddhism, but for all religions. His edicts encouraged mutual respect among different faiths, fostering a harmonious society (Malalasekera, 2012). He emphasized respect for other sects, saying that people should not denigrate other religions but rather understand them. This commitment is reflected in his inscriptions, which articulate a philosophy of compassion and respect toward all beliefs.

### **Communication and Accessibility:**

Aśoka made efforts to maintain direct communication with his subjects. He utilized inscriptions on pillars and rocks, which were accessible to the public, to share his messages of goodwill and ethical conduct (Seneviratna, 1994b). He utilized various communication methods, such as edicts inscribed on stone pillars, to convey messages of peace and governance to his subjects. This approach ensured greater accessibility to his policies and philosophies (Malalasekera, 2012). His paternalistic approach, where he referred to all individuals as his children, emphasized his commitment to their welfare.

### **Welfare for the Weaker Sections:**

He established a category of officials known as Dhamma-mahāmattas (officers of Dhammah) whose primary role was to look after the welfare of marginalized groups, including women, the elderly, and the poor (Seneviratna, 1994b). This focus on uplifting the disadvantaged reflected Asoka's understanding of social responsibility

and compassion, which were central tenets of Buddhist teachings. His efforts were aimed at ensuring that all societal groups could lead dignified lives and access essential services (Malalasekera, 2012). This initiative illustrated Aśoka's commitment to inclusivity in governance.

### **Promotion of Ethical Actions:**

Aśoka encouraged his subjects to engage in ethical actions rather than mere rituals. He advocated for kindness, charity, and respect for all beings, aligning closely with the teachings of Buddhism (Seneviratna, 1994b). Asoka's edicts often included exhortations to practice kindness and to refrain from harm, reflecting his deep commitment to Buddhist principles. He encouraged his subjects to engage in good deeds and to support one another, fostering a community built on mutual respect and ethical conduct (Malalasekera, 2012). This advocacy for ethical behaviour was not only a personal conviction but also a foundational aspect of his governance, aiming to create a just and peaceful society. This ethical framework contributed to the moral fabric of society and helped promote a sense of shared responsibility among his subjects.

### **Contribution to Buddhism**

Aśoka's most significant contribution to Buddhism was his promotion and propagation of the faith both within and beyond his empire. He supported the Buddhist Order and sent missionaries to propagate Buddhism overseas, thereby playing a crucial role in its transformation into a world religion (Seneviratna, 1994b). His edicts explicitly promote the principles of Dhamma, which signifies his commitment to spreading Buddhist teachings. King Aśoka constructed 84,000 monasteries across his realm, completing them within three years. With the help of Elder Indagutta's extraordinary abilities, the grand monastery known as Asokārāma was also completed. In addition, Aśoka built shrines in places visited by the Buddha. Once the monasteries were finished, letters from all 84,000

cities announced their completion on the same day. King Aśoka declared a grand festival across the kingdom to celebrate this achievement. He instructed those donations be made generously to the monastic community, pathways and monasteries be decorated with flowers and lights, and musical performances be organized. He encouraged people to observe religious practices, listen to Dhamma teachings, and make offerings, turning the occasion into a day of widespread devotion and merit-making (Malalasekera, 2012).

Aśoka's commitment to ethical rulership significantly contributed to nation-building by establishing a governance model centred around compassion, justice, and the welfare of all people. His legacy as a model ruler serves as an enduring influence on ethical governance throughout history. Aśoka the Great's contributions profoundly impacted Indian history, religion, and governance. His adoption of Buddhism and commitment to non-violence transformed his reign, promoting social welfare through hospitals, institutions, and infrastructure. By spreading Buddhist teachings across Asia, Aśoka established himself as one of history's most revered rulers, ensuring his ideals of compassion and enlightenment would influence future generations. His legacy remains foundational in shaping India's cultural and spiritual landscape. The following figure demonstrates some of the major concerns of Aśoka.



Figure: 1: Asoka's relationship with the government

## ‘Umar Ibn ‘abd Al-‘azīz’s Contributions To Governance Historical Context

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, also known as "the fifth rightly guided caliph," was born in 61 AH (680-720 CE) in Medina. He belonged to the Umayyad dynasty, being the son of Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwan and Umm Asim bint Asim, the granddaughter of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (Wellhausen & Weir, 2016). His lineage from both paternal and maternal sides significantly influenced his character and leadership qualities. Despite being born into wealth and privilege, Umar displayed a strong inclination toward piety and knowledge, shaped by his upbringing in Medina, a hub of Islamic scholarship (Muhammad, 2021a). Umar is regarded by many Sunni scholars as the first *mujaddid* (renewer of faith) and As Imam Ahmad stated: "Indeed, Allah Almighty appoints for this ummah at the beginning of every century someone who will renew its religion for it." Reflecting on the first century, we find ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and for the second century, we find Imam al-Shafi’i (Fareed, 2025). He is honorifically referred to as Umar al-Thani (Umar II) about his maternal great-grandfather, Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab. He was mentored by notable scholars and companions of the Prophet Muhammad, including Abdullah ibn Umar. His commitment to learning and self-

discipline marked him as a unique figure among the Umayyads. His leadership marked milestones such as the first official collection of hadiths and the introduction of universal education. He also encouraged the spread of Islam, sending emissaries to China and Tibet and overseeing the widespread acceptance of Islam in Persia and Egypt during his short reign.

Physically, Umar was described as lean, with a complexion ranging from fair to slightly dark. He had a prominent scar on his forehead from a childhood accident, earning him the nickname "*Ashajj Bannu Umayyah*" (the scarred one of the Umayyads) (al-Hamadani, 2015). However, it was his moral and spiritual qualities that truly defined him. Known for his humility, justice, and ascetic lifestyle, Umar consistently prioritized the welfare of others over personal comfort. His deep sense of accountability before God was reflected in his frequent weeping during Qur'anic recitations and his avoidance of indulgence, even as a ruler (al-Hamadani, 2015).

In 99 AH (717 CE), Umar reluctantly accepted the caliphate following the death of his cousin, Caliph Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik. Upon his appointment, Umar declared his intention to govern with justice and equity, famously stating, "This is a responsibility I never sought from Allah (Muhammad, 2021b)." He imposed conditions for his leadership, including the freedom to uphold justice without favouritism, the prohibition of using state funds for personal benefit, and the right to perform the Hajj pilgrimage during his first year in office. These principles became hallmarks of his administration (Muhammad, 2021b).

### **Reforms and Achievements of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz**

Omar bin Abdul Aziz, born into royal luxury, chose a life of simplicity upon ascending as caliph of the Umayyad Empire. He renounced worldly pleasures, motivated by his deep devotion to the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah. Despite holding significant power, he dedicated himself to preparing for the afterlife, prioritising



the eternal over material wealth. It was said to Malik bin Dinar: You are an ascetic. He said: How can I be an ascetic when I have a cloak and a robe? The ascetic is Omar bin Abdul Aziz. The world came to him, and he left it (Al-A'rābi, 1998). His modest lifestyle reflected his values; even at banquets, he consumed only what was necessary to quell his hunger. His frugality was striking; he allocated two dirhams daily for his family's lunch and dinner. His attire was simple and unadorned, and he dismissed the extravagant displays that had characterised the reigns of his predecessors. Not only did he refuse the excesses of the past, but he also ordered the sale of luxury items, directing the proceeds into the treasury for the benefit of all Muslims (Al-Ḥakeem, 1954). During his short reign of two years and five months, Umar implemented transformative reforms that addressed social, economic, and cultural issues:

#### **Administrative Reform:**

Umar's administrative skills were first demonstrated during his tenure as governor of Medina, starting in 86 AH (705 CE). He established a consultative council of ten eminent scholars to assist him in governance, emphasizing collective decision-making rooted in Islamic principles. Under his leadership, Medina flourished as a centre of justice and security. He expanded the Prophet's Mosque and implemented infrastructure projects, including the digging of wells and construction of roads (al-Hamadani, 2015). His equitable policies won the admiration of his contemporaries, laying the foundation for his later reforms as caliph. The most significant reform of Umar was affecting the equality of Arabs and *mawali* (non-Arab Muslims). This was mainly relevant to the non-Arab troops in the Muslim army, who had not been entitled to the same shares in spoils, lands and salaries given to Arab soldiers. The policy also applied to Muslim society at large (Blankinship, 1994).

### **Economic Reforms:**

Umar redistributed wealth equitably, ensuring that state resources reached the poor and marginalized. He reduced the financial burden on taxpayers and eradicated corruption by providing fair salaries to government officials (Muhammad, 2021c). Similarly, he abolished unjust taxes that burdened the populace and implemented reforms in land distribution, ensuring a more equitable allocation of resources. These measures not only alleviated the economic struggles of the lower classes but also empowered farmers and traders, fostering an environment of fairness and productivity (Husain, 2013). As a result, these policies led to significant economic growth, strengthened the social fabric, and enhanced the overall well-being of his people, demonstrating how ethical governance can transform a society.

### **Judicial Reforms:**

Upholding justice was a cornerstone of Umar's leadership. He replaced corrupt governors with competent and ethical individuals, monitoring their performance to ensure accountability (al-Hamadani, 2015). He has highlighted the importance of carefully selecting judges to prevent wrongful interference. He delineated five essential criteria for their role: knowledge, patience, chastity, consultation, and strength in upholding the truth. Any failure to meet these standards was considered unacceptable. He stressed that judges should base their decisions on evident truths and seek the counsel of knowledgeable higher authorities when facing uncertainty. Additionally, he introduced numerous jurisprudential rules to ensure citizens' well-being (Al-Şallābi, 2006).

### **Social Welfare:**

Umar's administration focused on improving the lives of ordinary citizens. He expanded public services, including healthcare and infrastructure, and established a fair system for distributing zakat (charitable alms). His policies fostered social harmony and economic stability (Muhammad, 2021c). He prioritised equitable wealth

distribution, effective governance, and ethical leadership. Notably, he revitalised the Zakat system, ensuring that aid reached those in need, sometimes exceeding the demand in certain areas (Al-Ḥakeem, 1954). Infrastructure development improved productivity and connectivity, while advancements in education, healthcare, and public services enhanced social welfare. His administration focused on moral conduct among officials, fostering trust and reducing corruption (Diggi, 2016).

### **Promotion of Religious Tolerance:**

Omar bin Abdul Aziz, a caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, embodies a remarkable amalgamation of admiration from diverse intellectual currents throughout history. Despite his Umayyad heritage, he garnered the respect and affection of various groups and communities. He advocated for the rights of all communities, including minorities, and upheld the principles of freedom of thought and belief within his empire (Amara, 1985).

### **Preservation of Islam:**

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz made significant contributions to religion, particularly in the preservation and dissemination of Islamic teachings. Among his most notable achievements was his systematic effort to document and safeguard the *hadith*—the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Initially, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) prohibited the recording of anything other than the Qur'an to avoid confusion and ensure the preservation of the divine text. However, this prohibition was later abrogated, allowing for the documentation of *hadith*. While some companions of the Prophet began to record *hadith* for their own use, the formal and state-supported compilation of *hadith* only began under the leadership of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. Recognizing the risks of the loss of knowledge and the spread of fabricated traditions due to sectarian and political divisions, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz prioritized the preservation of authentic Islamic teachings (al-Shaykh, 1996). Umar

appointed learned scholars such as Abu Bakr ibn Hazm, the governor of Medina and an esteemed jurist, to compile the sayings of the Prophet. He wrote to Ibn Hazm: "Look into the *hadith* of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and write them down, for I fear the loss of knowledge and the passing of scholars. Accept nothing but the *hadith* of the Prophet (PBUH), and spread knowledge so that those who do not know may learn. Knowledge does not perish unless it is concealed (al-Asqalani, n.d.)." Similarly, Umar instructed prominent scholars like Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri to compile and document *hadith*. Al-Zuhri stated, "Umar ibn Abdul Aziz commanded us to gather the *hadith*, so we wrote them down in notebooks, which he then sent to every province under his rule (al-Barr, 1990)." This effort marked the beginning of formal *hadith* compilation, which later flourished during subsequent generations. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani remarked that the systematic documentation of *hadith* started with Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri under Umar's directive, laying the foundation for later scholars to classify and authenticate Islamic traditions. It is said that he reached out to Ibn Hazm and Imam Al-Zuhri, urging them to compile the hadiths of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him (Al-Zahrani, 1996).

Umar's dedication to preserving Islam extended beyond *hadith* compilation. He encouraged all Muslims, regardless of their scholarly rank, to participate in safeguarding Islamic teachings. He wrote to the people of Medina, urging them to collect the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH), even if they possessed only a few traditions. Furthermore, he issued orders across the Islamic empire to ensure the documentation and transmission of knowledge. Through these measures, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's ensured that the teachings of Islam remained authentic and accessible for future generations (al-Shaykh, 1996). He actively sought the counsel of scholars, prioritising their insights over those of others. Additionally, he invested resources to enhance educational institutions across the nation and to restore mosques (Al-Ṣallābi, 2006). He also promoted Islamic education and

encouraged non-Muslims to embrace Islam through ethical governance rather than coercion (Muhammad, 2021c). His visionary leadership not only preserved the Islamic tradition but also reinforced its ethical framework, contributing to the stability and unity of the Muslim community.

## Death

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's tenure as caliph, although relatively short-lived, had a profound and lasting impact on the course of Islamic history. Ascending to power in a time marked by political turbulence and corruption, Umar implemented a series of significant reforms that garnered widespread admiration among his contemporaries as well as future generations. His governance was characterized by a commitment to justice, social equity, and the moral principles laid out in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

It is said that on his way back from Damascus to Aleppo or possibly to his Khunasira estate, Umar fell ill. He died between 5 February and 10 February 720, at the age of 39 (Wellhausen & Weir, 2016). Umar's sudden demise in 101 AH (720 CE) has been surrounded by mystery and speculation. It is suspected that he may have been poisoned as a direct consequence of his stringent anti-corruption policies which threatened the interests of powerful elites (Muhammad, 2021c). Despite the brevity of his reign, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's legacy endures as a paragon of Islamic leadership. He remains a symbol of justice and equity, and his life exemplifies the transformative power of ethical governance in society. His story serves as a powerful reminder of how integrity and moral commitment in leadership can transform societies, fostering justice and harmony. Central to his leadership philosophy were key principles such as *Taqwa* (God-consciousness), which guided his personal and public ethics; *Ihsan* (benevolence that covers religious tolerance), reflected in his social welfare policies; *Shura* (consultation and accessibility), ensuring participatory decision-making; and *Adl* (justice), which informed his comprehensive reforms to eliminate oppression and promote fairness. These values

together formed a holistic model of governance that continues to inspire inclusive and ethical leadership as highlights below.

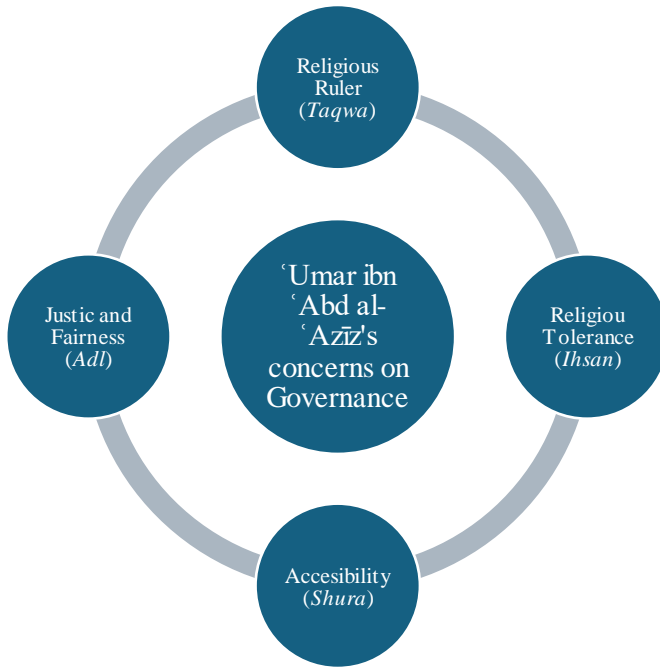


Figure: 2: Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz's relationship with the government

## Result And Discussion

### Comparative Analysis

Comparing the contributions of King Aśoka and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz highlights their shared dedication to ethical governance, social welfare, and justice, rooted in their respective cultural and religious traditions. King Aśoka transitioned from a military leader to a proponent of ethical governance and non-violence after the Kalinga War, focusing on compassion and peace through the principles of Dharma. Similarly, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz reformed the Umayyad caliphate by prioritizing justice and fairness, reversing the unjust practices of previous rulers and basing his governance on Islamic

ethics. Both leaders emphasized moral conduct and the welfare of their subjects as the cornerstone of their rule, showcasing a profound commitment to ethical principles in leadership. The following chart generally highlights the main features of both rulers.

Table 1: Comparing the contributions of King Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz

| Aspect                       | King Aśoka  | ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz  | Similarities   |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Period</b>                | 3rd Century BCE   | 8th Century CE   | Both ruled in eras marked by significant political and social transformations.     |
| <b>Region</b>                | Indian Subcontinent   | Umayyad Caliphate (Middle East and beyond)                             | Both governed vast, diverse, multi-ethnic empires.                                 |
| <b>Religious Identity</b>    | Buddhist  | Muslim   | Both were deeply influenced by their respective religions and spiritual teachings. |
| <b>Governance Philosophy</b> | Dhamma (ethical living, non-violence)                             | Islamic justice (Shariah, equity, and compassion)                      | Focused on ethical governance based on spiritual principles.                       |
| <b>Taxation Reforms</b>      | Reduced taxes and promote public welfare through social programs. | Abolished unjust taxes and redistributed wealth fairly among citizens. | Implemented economic reforms to reduce the burden on citizens.                     |

|               |   |   |  |
|---------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Legacy</b> | Known as the "Righteous Monarch" and a model for ethical rulership in Buddhism (Ray, 2020). | Referred to as the "Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph" for his pious and just governance (al-Shaykh, 1996). | Both left enduring legacies as exemplary rulers in their traditions. |
|---------------|---|---|--|

The above chart demonstrates how both leaders, despite their differences in time, culture, and religion, share remarkable parallels in their ethical and governance philosophies, focusing on justice, compassion, and societal welfare.

Their focus on social welfare and justice is particularly notable. Aśoka established hospitals, public works, and welfare measures such as free medical care and amenities for travellers, while ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz implemented reforms like public hospitals, financial aid for the poor, and care for orphans and the elderly. Judicial reforms were another key area of focus for both rulers; Aśoka ensured fairness and humane treatment of prisoners, while ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz emphasized equal justice for all and worked to combat corruption in judicial systems. Additionally, both leaders demonstrated religious tolerance: Aśoka promoted respect and unity among diverse religious sects, and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ensured the protection and welfare of non-Muslims under Islamic law, setting enduring examples of coexistence and mutual respect.

Communication, accessibility, and care for marginalized groups were central to their leadership styles. Aśoka used public inscriptions to convey his policies and ethical teachings, while ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz held public sessions to address concerns, prioritizing transparency and accountability. Both rulers also focused on the welfare of marginalized groups: Aśoka prioritized the needs of slaves and the impoverished, and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz implemented measures to protect orphans, women, and the poor. Finally, their emphasis on ethical actions over rituals underscored



their visionary leadership. Aśoka encouraged practical morality, and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz viewed governance as an ethical obligation and form of worship. Together, they exemplify how ethical governance rooted in compassion and justice can transform societies, leaving enduring legacies shaped by their distinct yet harmonious principles.

Table - 2 highlights the similarities and distinct influences of these leaders in fostering ethical governance and social welfare from the literature.

| Category                           | King Aśoka  | ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Transformational Leadership</b> | Transitioned from a military leader to a promoter of ethical governance and non-violence after the Kalinga War, emphasizing compassion and peace. | Transformed the Umayyad caliphate with justice and fairness, reversing unjust practices from prior rulers.  |
| <b>Governance Based on Ethics</b>  | Based on Dharma, focusing on moral conduct and the welfare of subjects.   | Rooted in Islamic ethics, reinforcing fairness and compassion in legal and administrative frameworks.       |
| <b>Social Welfare Initiatives</b>  | Established hospitals, public works, and welfare measures like free medical care and amenities for travellers.                                    | Instituted reforms like public hospitals, financial aid for the poor, and care for orphans and the elderly. |
| <b>Judicial Reforms</b>            | Advocated for justice and humane treatment of   | Ensured equal justice for all, emphasized community welfare,  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   | prisoners, promoting fairness in legal cases.                                       | and fought corruption in judicial systems.   |
| <b>Promotion of Religious Tolerance</b> | Advocated respect and unity among diverse religious sects.                          | Promoted tolerance for non-Muslims, ensuring their protection and welfare under Islamic law. |
| <b>Communication and Accessibility</b>  | Used inscriptions in public spaces to communicate policies and ethical teachings.   | Held public sessions to address concerns, ensuring transparency and accountability.          |
| <b>Welfare for Weaker Sections</b>      | Focused on marginalized groups, including outreach to slaves and the impoverished.  | Protected and supported marginalized groups like orphans, women, and the poor.               |
| <b>Encouragement of Ethical Actions</b> | Promoted ethical actions over rituals, advocating practical morality in daily life. | Emphasized sincerity in actions, linking governance to worship and ethical obligations.      |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                       | Focused on justice, compassion, and welfare, rooted in Buddhist principles.         | Prioritized justice, compassion, and welfare, deeply rooted in Islamic teachings.            |

Leadership and governance in human history have often been shaped by profound ethical and spiritual principles, as exemplified by King Aśoka of ancient India and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, the Umayyad caliph. Both leaders, though emerging from distinct cultural and religious traditions—Buddhism and Islam—demonstrated

remarkable parallels in their commitment to justice, compassion, and the welfare of their people. Their contributions reflect not only their transformations but also their adherence to the core ethical values of their faiths. By exploring the foundational principles of their governance—rooted in concepts like *Dharma* and *Adl* (justice), *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Ihsan* (kindness), and their shared emphasis on social welfare, religious tolerance, and ethical leadership—we gain valuable insights into how diverse spiritual traditions converge on universal values of human dignity and collective well-being. This comparative analysis bridges Islamic (Arabic) and Buddhist (Pali/Sanskrit) terminologies, offering a rich perspective on the ethical dimensions of leadership that transcend time and culture.

Table 3: The chart comparing the eight elements of leadership and governance using Islamic (Arabic) and Buddhist (Pali or Sanskrit) terms:

| Category                           | Islamic (Arabic) Terms   | Buddhist (Pali/Sanskrit) Terms   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Transformational Leadership</b> | <i>Al-Qiyadah Ma al-Qudwa</i> (القيادة مع القدوة): Leadership with exemplary<br><i>Islah</i> (إصلاح): Reform and betterment. | <i>Parivartana</i> : Transformation or change.<br><i>Ahimsa</i> : Non-violence and compassion. |
| <b>Governance Based on Ethics</b>  | <i>Adl</i> (عدل): Justice.<br><i>Akhlaq</i> (أخلاق): Ethical conduct.<br><i>Maslahah</i> (مصلحة): Public interest.           | <i>Dharma</i> : Moral law and duty.<br><i>Sila</i> : Ethical discipline or virtue.             |
| <b>Social Welfare Initiatives</b>  | <i>Zakat</i> (زكاة): Almsgiving.   | <i>Dana</i> : Generosity or charity.   |

|                                  |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
|                                  | <p><b>Sadaqah (صدقة):</b><br/>Voluntary charity.</p> <p><b>Waqf (وقف):</b><br/>Endowments for public welfare.</p>                                   | <p><b>Karuna:</b> Compassion towards others.</p>  |
| Judicial Reforms                 | <p><b>Qist (قسط):</b> Equity and fairness.</p> <p><b>Huqooq al-Ibad (حقوق العباد):</b> Rights of individuals.</p>                                   | <p><b>Nyaya:</b> Justice.</p> <p><b>Anukampa:</b> Empathy or consideration for fairness.</p>  |
| Promotion of Religious Tolerance | <p><b>Sulh (صلح):</b> Reconciliation.</p> <p><b>La Ikraha fi al-Din (لا إكراه في الدين):</b> No compulsion in religion (Qur'an 2:256).</p>          | <p><b>Samannagata:</b> Harmony or unity.</p> <p><b>Metta:</b> Loving-kindness towards all beings.</p>                                 |
| Communication and Accessibility  | <p><b>Shura (شورى):</b> Consultation.</p> <p><b>Bayan (بيان):</b> Clarity in communication.</p> <p><b>Mas'uliyah (مسؤولية):</b> Accountability.</p> | <p><b>Dhamma Desana:</b> Teaching or proclamation of Dharma.</p> <p><b>Upadesha:</b> Advice or instruction.</p>                       |
| Welfare for Weaker Sections      | <p><b>Kifala (كفالة):</b> Guardianship for orphans and vulnerable groups.</p> <p><b>Ihsan (إحسان):</b> Excellence and kindness.</p>                 | <p><b>Anukampa:</b> Compassion for the weak.</p> <p><b>Sangha Dana:</b> Support for the community, including monks and the needy.</p> |
| Encouragement of Ethical Actions | <p><b>Amr bil Ma'ruf wa Nahy an al-Munkar</b><br/>(الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن)</p>  | <p><b>Sila:</b> Ethical conduct.</p>  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>(المنكر): Enjoining good and forbidding evil.</p> <p><i>Taqwa</i> (تقوى): Consciousness of God.</p> | <p><b>Karma:</b> Ethical actions and their consequences.</p> <p><b>Punya:</b> Meritorious actions.</p> |
|--|--|--|

The Islamic terms mentioned above in Table 3, grounded in Quranic principles, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence, emphasise justice, compassion, and social welfare. Similarly, Buddhist terms, drawn from the foundational teachings of the Pali and Sanskrit traditions, centre on ethical living, non-violence, and compassion for all beings. This comparison underscores how both traditions offer strong ethical frameworks for leadership and governance, deeply rooted in their respective spiritual teachings, and promote justice and compassion within their societies. These terms are not only integral to the religious doctrines of Buddhism and Islam but are also strictly adhered to by two influential leaders, Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, reflecting a profound understanding and application of these principles within their rule.

### Relevance To Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s pluralistic society can draw inspiration from these leaders to address contemporary challenges. By fostering shared ethical values, policymakers can promote unity and sustainable development. Both Buddhists and Muslims can contribute to the country. The legacies of King Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz provide valuable insights that continue to resonate in modern Sri Lanka, especially in terms of fostering cooperation and rebuilding the nation through ethical governance, social welfare, and inter-religious harmony. Here are some details regarding modern reflections on their contributions and how these insights aid in rebuilding Sri Lanka.

## **Ethical Governance and Reconciliation Initiatives as a good citizen**

Aśoka's emphasis on ethical governance and the welfare of his subjects provides an enduring model for modern leaders, encouraging public good, ethical decision-making, and accountability. These principles are vital for restoring trust in political institutions in Sri Lanka. Similarly, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's model of justice focused on fairness and the protection of rights for all citizens, including minorities, offers valuable lessons for fostering equity and inclusivity. Both leaders also highlighted the importance of reconciliation and tolerance. Aśoka's promotion of inter-religious dialogue and respect for different faiths can inspire contemporary efforts to bridge divides between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka. Likewise, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's policies of tolerance can serve as a blueprint for mending social rifts and promoting mutual respect among diverse communities.

## **Social Welfare and Cultural Heritage**

The commitment of both Aśoka and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz to social welfare initiatives underscores the importance of prioritising the well-being of people. Modern Sri Lanka can draw from these historical examples to revive comprehensive programs focusing on healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, particularly in post-conflict regions. Aśoka's promotion of Buddhism shaped Sri Lankan cultural heritage, reinforcing Sinhalese identity while advocating respect for other religions. This model can contribute to fostering a harmonious national identity during periods of ethnic tension. Similarly, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's legacy supports the cultural integration of Muslim communities, encouraging recognition of their historical contributions and promoting unity in diversity.

### **Community Engagement and Education**

Both Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz emphasized the importance of engaging with local communities and listening to their needs. This participatory approach can inspire modern governance to involve citizens in decision-making processes and promote grassroots initiatives that rebuild communal trust and cooperation. Their focus on moral teachings can also be adapted into modern educational curricula, emphasizing ethical training for youth. Such efforts can shape future generations to value coexistence, compassion, and social responsibility, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

### **Collaborative Development and Interfaith Dialogue**

Modern Sri Lanka can draw inspiration from the cooperative spirit exemplified by Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to foster unity through joint development projects. Engaging Buddhist and Muslim communities in initiatives such as educational institutions, health services, and community development programs can strengthen inter-community relationships and build trust. Similarly, establishing platforms for interfaith dialogues, inspired by the principles of these historical leaders, can help address grievances, facilitate mutual understanding, and promote shared values. Such dialogues can play a crucial role in fostering peace and reducing tensions between diverse religious and ethnic groups.

### **Promotion of Universal Values and Civic Action**

The ethical legacies of Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, rooted in principles of compassion, non-violence, and justice, provide a foundation for national policies that emphasize universal human rights seeking commonalities between diverse societies. Public campaigns that highlight these values can encourage national healing and cooperation among Sri Lanka’s diverse communities. Furthermore, fostering civic engagement by involving citizens in inclusive governance, modelled after Aśoka’s and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-

‘Azīz’s participatory approaches, can restore trust in political institutions. Creating forums for citizen input in policy formation can lead to more representative governance and active citizenship. Together, these measures can help rebuild a cohesive, inclusive society in Sri Lanka, paving the way for reconciliation and sustainable progress.

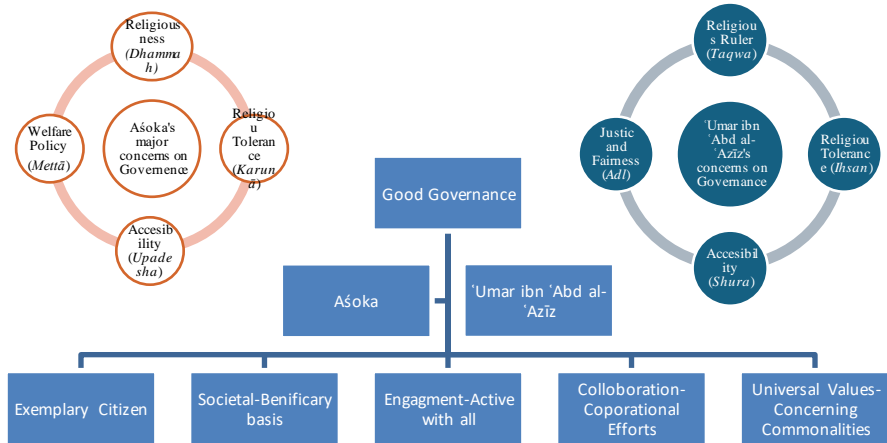


Figure 3: Universal Values and Civic Action Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz

The concept of Shared Ethical Governance as highlighted in the above figure 3, is embodied in the leadership of both King Aśoka and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who emphasized universal principles of societal welfare and ethical leadership. Their governance focused on cultivating good citizenship, fostering societal benefits, encouraging active engagement with all communities, promoting collaborative efforts, and upholding universal values rooted in commonalities. These shared concerns reflect their commitment to harmony, justice, and the collective well-being of their societies.

## Conclusion

While Aśoka’s governance was rooted in Buddhist principles of non-violence and harmony, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s was guided



by Islamic principles of justice and accountability. These differences highlight the adaptability of ethical governance across cultural and religious contexts. Indeed, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz follows Islamic governance that emphasizes principles such as justice, accountability, consultation, and transparency, rooted in Qur'anic teachings and Shariah objectives (Halim & Osmani, 2023). These principles align with modern concepts of good governance, including rule of law, social welfare, and public participation (Batchelor, 2014). Similarly, Buddhist-inspired governance, as exemplified by Aśoka's rule, promoted nonviolence, social welfare, religious tolerance, and responsive administration (Long & Long, 2021). 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz caliphate demonstrated effective governance through efficiency, honesty, equity, transparency, and accountability, consistent with Islamic principles of *al-Siasah al-Shariyyah*. Despite their different religious foundations, both Aśoka's and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's governance models share common elements with contemporary good governance practices, highlighting the adaptability of ethical governance across cultural contexts.

Therefore, the governance models of King Aśoka and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz offer timeless lessons in justice, compassion, and inclusivity. By embracing these shared ethical paradigms, Sri Lanka can strengthen inter-communal harmony and build a resilient, unified nation. The enduring legacies of these leaders underscore the potential of ethical governance to transcend religious and cultural divides, fostering a future rooted in shared values and mutual respect.

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