

# 'UMAR IBN KHATTAB, AN EPITOME OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP: A SUSTAINABLE LESSON FOR CONTEMPORARY LEADERS

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## Abstract

Servant Leadership is believed to have been a new theory coined and inserted into the field of leadership and management by an American Scholar, Robert Greenleaf in early 1970s. Since then, it has been one of the important types of leadership that attract the interest of the Scholars or Researchers. Therefore, the paper intends to portray an icon and epitome of such leadership style from Islamic perspective, 'Umar ibn Khattab (r.a), the second Caliph in Islam. It presents the historical background of the icon. It also discusses the definition and origin of the theory. The paper also enumerates evidences of emulation of the icon from authentic literature. Likewise, it portrays the servant leadership characteristics as it can be seen in 'Umar's personality (r.a). In an attempt to dig into the root of the theory, the paper looks into the Chinese, Christianity and Western perspectives of the style. The study contains no numerical or statistical value in achieving its aims and objectives, that is to say, purely qualitative research methodology is employed. The study re-emphasizes that the theory is one of the theories or styles which have been enshrined in Islam since 14 century ago. It also depicts that 'Umar ibn Khattab (r.a) was an important figure to be emulated in actualizing the theory. It is anticipated that sustainability of a good governance and management in any given community or organization will be achieved by putting the characteristics into practice. Furthermore, it is expected that many contemporary leadership dilemmas will be overcome, if the contemporary leaders follow the Caliph's step.

**Keywords**-- *Caliph, Contemporary leader, Islam, Servant Leadership, Umar Ibn Khatab.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the field of leadership and management, servant leadership is one of the important types. The idea came to lime light in early 70s when an American Scholar, Robert Greenleaf wrote his article "the servant as leader". After the article's publication, the servant leader guru devoted the rest of his life to the development of the concept. He left many unpublished essays behind which were published into edited books under Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. Larry Spears headed this center for 17years and served as editor for many of these books (Greenleaf, 1996, 1998; Spears and Lawrence, 2002; Abdul Mutalib & Wan Razali 2012; Ogunbado, 2012; 2014). Since then the concept has been caught the interest of the researches.

Having said that, Ayub (1996) Beekun & Badawi, (1999) and Ogunbado, (2012) and (2019) among others have postulated that the idea has been featured in Islamic leadership since its establishment 14 century ago. It is against this backdrop that this paper tries to portray an important icon of the Islamic leadership in general and servant leadership in particular of the first generation. 'Umar ibn Khattab, the second caliph in Islam.

After the introduction, the paper discusses the problem statement followed by research questions and objectives. It also deliberates the employed methodology followed by brief biography of the Icon. The paper depicts the origin and definition of servant leader.

It also presents the evidences or legality to substantiate emulation of the icon so as to be followed or emulated as a sustainable lesson for contemporary leaders and managers. This is followed by looking into the characteristics of the servant leadership and how it can be found in 'Umar otherwise known as *al-faruq's* personality or character.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nowadays, there are many flaws in leadership in Muslim nations, from political to organizational leadership. States have been dilapidated due to the lack of good leadership, firms, business; ventures are not in isolated in this manner. It has been indicated that chaos and corruption that are prevailing in human setting in Muslim world in particular and the entire world in general except in few cases, are indication of weak and inept leadership (Ogunbado, 2012; 2019; Khan, 2016). A renowned Egyptian Scholar, Imam Kishk among others realized the dilemma or the problem of leadership in Muslim world and called upon the leaders to serve their nation and not their selfishness. To emulate Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) steps and that of his rightly guided caliphs (a.s) (Ali-Agan, 2016).

Furthermore, having realized the leadership quandary in different human settings, Ogunbado (2014) suggests servant leadership as a mechanism to eradicate the malady in our society. Therefore, this paper aims to bring an epitome of servant leadership into a limelight so as to serve as a sustainable manual or guidance to the contemporary leaders.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper set to answer the following questions:

- ❖ Who is 'Umar ibn Khattab (r.a)?
- ❖ What is servant leadership and its origin?
- ❖ Are there any divine evidences in emulating 'Umar ibn Khatab (r.a) personality?
- ❖ What are the characteristics of servant leadership and how they can be illustrated from 'Umar ibn Khatab (r.a) personality?

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- ❖ To review the biography of 'Umar ibn Khatab (r.a).
- ❖ To investigate the definition and origin of servant leadership.