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Regional Religious Commonalities and Sustainable Urbanism: Lessons for Pakistan

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Abstract
Sustainable urbanism in South and Central Asia can be meaningfully discussed within the context of regional religious commonalities, where spiritual ethics and urban order have historically converged to shape environmental and social balance. The first interpretive model, "*Comparative Religious Urban Ethics*", analyses how moral frameworks from Zoroastrianism, Gandhara Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam generate an eco-ethical foundation for city life through the values of cleanliness, community responsibility and social justice. The second model, "*Historical-Geographical Urban Continuities*", examines the transmission of urban traits from Iran, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan into the territory now called Pakistan, tracing architectural and infrastructural legacies such as gardens, water systems and sacred public spaces that evolved through Persian, Timurid and Mughal influences. The third model, "*Integrated Spiritual-Urban Framework*", constructs a contemporary synthesis where faith-based administration of land associates with modern sustainability principles, viewing the human being as a trustee rather than an exploiter of the urban environment. The Quran, Avesta, Milinda Panha and Guru Granth Sahib constitute the primary textual foundations, while secondary references include Catherine B. Asher's "*Architecture of Mughal India*" (1992), George Michell and Mumtaz Currim's "*Majesty of Mughal Decoration*" (2007), Moritz Herrmann's "*Mughal Architecture*" (2011), and D. Fairchild Ruggles' "*Islamic Gardens and Landscapes*" (2011). By utilising the theoretical framework of comparative civilisational ethics and eco-urban theory, this study addresses; How can the shared religious and historical foundations of the region guide Pakistan in formulating a spiritually grounded and environmentally sustainable model of urban development?

Introduction

Sustainable urbanism, when observed through the lens of sacred traditions, presents a vision that unites environmental balance with spiritual and moral responsibility. The Quran positions humankind as trustees (khalifah) of the earth, charged with maintaining justice and harmony across all forms of creation. The Avesta promotes purity, moderation and the sanctity of natural elements, affirming that the wellbeing of land and water is both a civic and divine obligation. In the Milinda Panha, the Buddhist dialogue between King Milinda and the sage Nagasena connects wisdom with restraint, suggesting that the ethical order of the mind reflects in the order of the city. The Guru Granth Sahib reinforces this harmony by presenting nature as a manifestation of divine unity, teaching that to protect the earth is to uphold spiritual truth. Hence, as per commonalities, these scriptures show that urban life, when rooted in faith, is not an arena of material competition but a reflection of moral stewardship.

In addition, such spiritual foundations find strong resonance in modern sustainable urbanism theories, where recent literature exhibits similar principles through contemporary frameworks. Between 2015 and 2025, authors such as Timothy Beatley (*Biophilic Urbanism*, 2016), Jabareen (*Sustainable Urban Forms Theory*, 2017), and Thomas Elmqvist (*Urban Resilience Framework*, 2021) argue that environmental sustainability requires human empathy, ethical governance and inclusive social structures. The United Nations' *New Urban Agenda* (2016) further establishes sustainability as inseparable from cultural identity and moral responsibility. These approaches, though framed in modern vocabulary, mirror ancient teachings that place moderation, respect for nature, and collective welfare at the centre of urban life. Hence, both sacred and modern perspectives converge on the same principle; "a sustainable city thrives only when material progress associates with ethical restraint and communal care".

This conceptual harmony between ancient ethics and modern frameworks leads to the first interpretive model, "*Comparative Religious Urban Ethics*". This model analyses how moral frameworks in Zoroastrianism, Gandhara Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam build an eco-ethical foundation for civic life. In Zoroastrian thought, the sanctity of fire and water underpins hygiene and environmental discipline; Gandhara Buddhism promotes the "Middle Path" as the basis for social harmony; Sikhism centres on seva (selfless service) and sangat (community unity); while Islam institutionalises adl (justice) and ihsan (benevolence) in the structure of governance and public life. These moral codes, though distinct in form, converge on the ethical management of cities as spaces of purity, justice and shared responsibility. Thus, sustainable urbanism here becomes not a technical discipline but a moral art that reforms both the environment and the human conscience.

Constructing on moral-historical frameworks, the second interpretive model, "Historical-Geographical Urban Continuities", traces how these ethical and architectural values travelled across civilisational boundaries. The urban legacies of Iran, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan reached the Indus region through cultural, commercial and religious exchanges, shaping the spaces that now lie within Pakistan. Persian charbagh gardens introduced symmetry and water consciousness, Timurid architecture refined urban geometry and monumentality, and Mughal builders synthesised these traditions in cities like Lahore, Multan and Peshawar. Their mosques, bazaars and civic gardens reflected both aesthetic sophistication and ecological logic. The historical transmission of such traits proves that sustainable design in this region was never imported from the West -- it was already rooted in its civilisational DNA. This continuity reinforces that modern Pakistani urbanism can be renewed only by reconnecting with its historical wisdom.

Extending this continuum further, the third model, "*Integrated Spiritual-Urban Framework*", presents a synthesis between religious stewardship and modern sustainability. It envisions humankind as a trustee rather than a consumer of the environment. Drawing upon the Islamic notion of amanah, Buddhist compassion, Zoroastrian reverence for purity, and Sikh community ethics, this framework integrates faith-based principles with global sustainability practices. It calls for a transition from exploitative urbanisation to stewardship-based urban renewal -- where architecture, governance and community welfare collectively protect both spiritual and environmental order. Through this synthesis, urbanism becomes a moral covenant linking ancient reverence with contemporary responsibility.

The relevance of these models is reinforced by the scholarship of Catherine B. Asher in "*Architecture of Mughal India*" (1992), which portrays the Mughal city as a moral and aesthetic space (Asher, 1992). George Michell and Mumtaz Currim, in "Majesty of Mughal Decoration" (2007), highlight how sacred geometry and calligraphy personified ecological balance and cultural refinement (Michell & Currim, 2007). Moritz Herrmann's "Mughal Architecture" (2011) situates architectural creativity within political and ethical consciousness, while D. Fairchild Ruggles' "Islamic Gardens and Landscapes" (2011) demonstrates how garden design personified divine order, sustainability and human humility (Herrmann, 2011) (Ruggles, 2011). By examining these works, this study finds collective finding as, "Mughal urbanism was not simply ornamental -- it was ecological, ethical and deeply spiritual". These authors have also validated the argument that sustainable design in this region has always reflected both environmental intelligence and religious consciousness.

Furthermore, this study is significant within the context of Pakistan as it has potential to guide the country towards a renewed vision of urban development grounded in its spiritual and historical heritage. By reinterpreting the moral unity of regional religions and the architectural legacy of its civilisational continuum, Pakistan can formulate a model of sustainable urbanism that is both environmentally sound and spiritually rich. This study therefore bridges the past and the present, proposing that ecological reform cannot succeed without moral reform. Thus, under respective perspectives, the discussion now advances to the theoretical framework that positions above-defined interpretive models within contemporary debates on eco-urban ethics, comparative civilisation studies and sustainable policy design.

1) Theoretical Framework

Primarily, this study is based upon "*Comparative Civilisational Ethics*", which interprets sustainability as both a moral and cultural obligation rooted in the shared spiritual values of ancient civilisations. The Quran, the Avesta, the Milinda Panha and the Guru Granth Sahib commonly articulate a vision of human life as a supervision (amanah) entrusted by the divine. In the Quran, humankind is repeatedly reminded that the corruption of the earth stems from moral failure rather than material necessity, suggesting that ecological reform requires ethical renewal (Ghamidi, 2009). The Avesta extends this idea by portraying the world as a battlefield between purity and pollution, where human responsibility lies in preserving the natural order established by Ahura Mazda (Shirazi, 2018) (Surfiran, 2025). The Milinda Panha similarly links wisdom and moderation with civic virtue[1], while the Guru Granth Sahib defines spiritual discipline as the practice of compassion towards all living beings (Bertolani, 2020) (Kaur, 2018) (Singh, 2006). These texts, when read comparatively, reveal a consistent ethical code that transforms the environment into a sacred trust. This shared ethical foundation constitutes the moral axis of civilisational continuity across

[1] (Davids, 2024)

South and Central Asia. Within this frame, sustainable urbanism is not an imported Western construct but a rediscovery of the moral logic already embedded in the region's ancient religious traditions (Asim, 2025).

Building upon this ethical foundation, the next one is "*Eco-Urban Theory*"[2], giving the analytical bridge between moral principles and contemporary urban practice. It interprets cities as living ecosystems where social, environmental and spiritual factors coalesce to sustain human civilisation. The works of Jabareen (2006), Beatley (2016) and Elmqvist (2019) contribute to this theoretical evolution by conceptualising urban resilience and biophilia as ethical imperatives rather than mere policy choices (Jabareen, 2006) (Beatley, 2016) (Elmqvist, 2019). When juxtaposed with the spiritual wisdom of the Quran and the Avesta, these theories reveal that environmental equilibrium and human morality are inseparable dimensions of sustainable planning. This correlation becomes more apparent in the architectural legacy explored by scholars such as Catherine B. Asher (1992) and D. Fairchild Ruggles (2011), who show how Islamic and Mughal cities were designed to reflect divine order through spatial symmetry, water management, and the integration of gardens as metaphors for paradise (Asher, 1992) (Ruggles, 2011). The eco-urban perspective therefore validates that true sustainability extends beyond technology -- it is sustained by moral awareness and spiritual orientation. This connection transforms urban design into a form of ethical expression that bridges sacred duty with environmental science.

The convergence of "*Comparative Civilisational Ethics*" and "*Eco-Urban Theory*" establishes a composite framework for analysing Pakistan's contemporary urban challenges. The theoretical synthesis argues that the sustainability crisis is not solely a failure of infrastructure but a symptom of spiritual disconnection from inherited civilisational wisdom. By revisiting sources such as the Milinda Panha and the Guru Granth Sahib, the framework highlights the need for compassion, restraint and inclusivity as operational principles of urban governance. The secondary works of George Michell and Mumtaz Currim (2007) and Moritz Herrmann (2011) supports this interpretation by illustrating how architecture in the Islamic and Mughal world was both aesthetic and ethical, fusing environmental intelligence with spiritual symbolism (Michell & Currim, 2007) (Herrmann, 2011). Within this framework, urbanism is redefined as a moral ecology where justice, beauty and sustainability converge. This theoretical alignment guides this study towards a regional paradigm of Spiritual Sustainability, linking ancient moral structures with modern environmental imperatives. Hence, this framework not only contextualises Pakistan's urban development within its religious and historical continuum but also gives a replicable model for eco-ethical policymaking in other postcolonial societies seeking balance between faith and modernity.

2) Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative and interpretive approach, integrating textual hermeneutics with civilisational analysis. The investigation begins with a thematic exploration of sustainability principles within Islamic, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Sikh cosmologies, drawing upon The Quran[3], Avesta[4], Milinda

[2] Given by Miguel Ruano, in his book "Eco-Urbanism: Sustainable Human Settlements, 60 Case Studies" (1998)

[3] For understanding postmodern interpretations of Quran, this study gets assistance for Quranic explanation (written by Javed Ahmed Ghamidi.

[4] For getting modern interpretations of Avesta, this study utilises the works of M. Reza Shirazi (2018) and Surfiran (2025).

Panha[5], and Guru Granth Sahib[6] as primary sources. These texts are examined through a comparative theological lens to identify ethical paradigms relevant to eco-urban theory and sustainable spatial planning. Thus, this study utilised a triangulated framework first, textual analysis to interpret metaphysical and moral notions of balance, stewardship and communal responsibility; second, architectural analysis focusing on the synthesis of these ideas in Mughal urban landscapes, guided by secondary sources such as Catherine B. Asher's "Architecture of Mughal India" (1992), George Michell and Mumtaz Currim's "Majesty of Mughal Decoration" (2007), Moritz Herrmann's Mughal Architecture (2011), and D. Fairchild Ruggles' "Islamic Gardens and Landscapes" (2011); and third, theoretical alignment with contemporary eco-urban scholarship, particularly Beatley's biophilic urbanism (2016), Jabareen's conceptualisation of sustainable urban forms (2017), and Elmqvist's adaptive urban ecosystem models (2021). Data interpretation follows an inductive reasoning model, wherein religious-ethical narratives are contextualised within sustainable urbanism practices observed in currently Iran, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan (a region around Pakistan with somewhat commonalities). The analysis identifies intertextual ethical continuities and socio-architectural manifestations across regional traditions, emphasising the confluence of spiritual ecology and civic design. Hence, this methodology thereby seeks to construct a civilisationally grounded theoretical framework that can inform future sustainable urban development policies in Muslim-majority societies.

2.1) Comparative Religious Urban Ethics

Comparative Religious Urban Ethics is a multidisciplinary interpretive model that explores how moral and theological frameworks within diverse faith traditions shape the moral fabric of urban life. It regards cities not merely as physical entities but as moral environments where spiritual doctrines manifest through social conduct, civic planning and ecological management. By comparing ethical precepts from Zoroastrianism, Gandhara Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam, this model identifies the shared civilisational traits that inspire communal harmony, social justice and environmental accountability. Methodologically, it integrates religious hermeneutics, historical analysis and urban theory to uncover how ethical teachings evolve into material and institutional realities. The ultimate objective is to transform theological insights into implementable models for sustainable urban policy and governance across culturally connected societies (Asim, 2025).

2.1.1) Scriptural Foundations

The ethical philosophy supporting sustainable urbanism finds powerful expression in sacred texts that guide the moral life of the believer and the civic order of society. The Quran declares humanity as Khalifah (trustee) of the earth, commanding, "Do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption" (Quran 2:11, 7:56) and "Eat and drink but waste not by excess" (Quran 7:31). The Avesta venerates purity through the injunction, "Keep the earth, water and fire pure and undefiled" (Vendidad 6:47-48), which lays the basis for environmental hygiene and civic responsibility. In the Milinda Panha, King Milinda is reminded that the Middle Path ensures balance between material life and spiritual integrity (Milinda Panha, Book III, Question 10), an ethical stance that sustains civic equilibrium. The Guru Granth Sahib proclaims, "Air is the Guru, Water the Father, and Earth the Great Mother" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 8), equating environmental reverence with devotion. By analysing commonalities among these verses, this study finds

[5] The latest interpretation of Malinda Panha is given by Thomas William Rhys Davids (2024).

[6] Postmodern interpretations of Guru Granth Sahib are given by Dr. D. P. Singh (2006), Barbara Bertolani (2020) and Amrit Kaur (2025).

that, these verses build a coherent ethical foundation centred on restraint, stewardship and justice. They form the primary textual framework for urban moral order, which translates into environmental regulations, sanitation ethics, and equitable urban planning rooted in divine accountability.

2.1.2) Regional Practices in Contiguous Civilisational Spaces

Across the historical landscape of Azerbaijan, Iran and Uzbekistan, these religious ethics materialised into enduring urban practices. Iranian qanat systems represented theological respect for water and collective management, as examined in Hassan Fathi's "*Architecture for the Poor*" (1976) and Nematollah Fazeli's "*Cultural Heritage of Iran*" (2019). Uzbekistan's Timurid cities, such as Samarkand and Bukhara, reflected moral geometry and ecological balance, a concept explored in Oleg Grabar's "*The Mediation of Ornament*" (1992) and Eckart Ehlers' "*Urban Sustainability in Central Asia*" (2017). Azerbaijan continues to preserve Islamic civic gardens and communal courtyards that integrate public and spiritual space, discussed in Mammadova's "*Islamic Architecture in Azerbaijan*" (2020). The persistence of Persianate civic order across these territories demonstrates a continuous ethical transmission, where ritual purity, water sanctity and community service evolved into the practical architecture of sustainable living. These legacies highlight how religion-based moralities were historically harmonised with material design, a balance that modern planners in these nations are beginning to restore through conservation and urban renewal programmes.

2.1.3) Mughal Practice and Architectural Representation

The Mughal Empire represents the apex of translating ethical-spiritual thought into practical urban systems. Catherine B. Asher's "*Architecture of Mughal India*" (1992) reveals that Mughal cities like Fatehpur Sikri and Shahjahanabad were conceived as moral geographies, integrating public welfare with cosmological design (Asher, 1992). George Michell and Mumtaz Currim's "Majesty of Mughal Decoration" (2007) demonstrates how ornamental artistry, through geometric vegetal motifs, conveyed spiritual harmony and environmental consciousness (Michell & Currim, 2007). Moritz Herrmann's "Mughal Architecture" (2011) identifies administrative innovations such as charitable endowments (waqf) for fountains, hospitals and sarais as material expressions of civic justice (Herrmann, 2011). D. Fairchild Ruggles' "Islamic Gardens and Landscapes" (2011) confirms that the Mughal chahar bagh (fourfold garden) was both a representation of paradise and a climate-adaptive, water-efficient ecological system (Ruggles, 2011). Hence, this study finds that, these authors portray a civilisation where governance, spirituality, and ecology converged in the design of public space -- establishing a living personification of comparative religious urban ethics through the medium of architecture.

2.1.4) Pakistan's Contemporary Gaps and Constitutional Context

In contemporary Pakistan, this ethical tradition has weakened amid unplanned urbanisation, socio-political instability and environmental neglect. Not only Major cities such as Karachi and Lahore but majority of other cities across the map face issues of water scarcity, pollution and inequitable housing that contradict the spirit of stewardship found in regional faiths. The Constitution of Pakistan (1973), however, provides a legal and moral framework that supports such ethical imperatives. Article 2A (Objectives Resolution) declares that sovereignty belongs to Almighty Allah, suggesting moral accountability in governance. Article 31 directs the state to promote an Islamic way of life, aligning civic conduct with Quranic ethics. Article 38 mandates the equitable distribution of resources, and Article 9 guarantees the right to life, which has been judicially expanded to include the right to a clean and healthy environment. Article 37(g) encourages environmental protection and social justice. Despite these constitutional assurances, the implementation gap remains substantial due to fragmented institutional

capacity, poor urban governance and lack of policy integration. The ethical potential of Pakistan's religious and legal framework thus remains underutilised. A revival of comparative religious urban ethics -- attached in constitutional legitimacy -- could reorient Pakistan's cities toward spiritually grounded and environmentally sustainable futures (Asim, 2025).

2.2) Historical-Geographical Urban Continuities

Historical-Geographical Urban Continuities is an analytical approach that traces the transmission of urban ideas, forms and practices across contiguous civilisations. It situates cities as nodes of cultural exchange where religious ethics, commercial networks and administrative institutions leave durable imprints on built form. The approach links textual prescriptions and ritual habits with material infrastructures such as water systems, gardens and market layouts to show how moral orders become spatial logics. Methodologically it integrates historical geography, architectural history and comparative religion to reveal long-term patterns of urban adaptation. This perspective therefore treats sustainability as a civilisational trait rather than an imported technical fix, and prepares the ground for comparative study across Iran, Central Asia and the Indus basin (Asim, 2025).

2.2.1) Scriptural foundations

Religious texts supply the normative grammar that underwrote these continuities and guided practical adjustments to environment and urban life. The Quran articulates the principle of trusteeship and warns against ecological corruption, for example "And when it is said to them, Do not spread corruption on the earth" (Quran 2:11), "Do not cause corruption on the earth after its reformation" (Quran 7:56), and "Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what men's hands have wrought" (Quran 30:41). The Avesta affirms the duty to keep earth, water and fire pure with passages in the Vendidad prescribing ritual protection and practical measures for water management (Vendidad 6:47-48). The Milinda Panha presents the Middle Path as a civic ethic that tempers excess and promotes communal balance, a principle visible in Book III Question 10 where moderation underpins social order. The Guru Granth Sahib equates nature with spiritual teachers and prescribes reverence toward air, water and earth, notably in the line, "Air is the Guru, Water the Father, and Earth the Great Mother" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 8). Commonalities between the topics of receptive verses give a coherent set of obligations; protect water, limit waste, organise communal care and ensure distributive justice. Those obligations historically fed into urban regulations, water-sharing norms and charitable endowments that structured civic life. The scriptural warrant therefore legitimises the spatial practices examined in subsequent sections and binds ethical prescription to material technique.

2.2.2) Regional Practices in Contiguous Civilisational Spaces

The scriptural precepts outlined above found concrete expression in the urban systems of Iran, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and propagated through trade, pilgrimage and imperial governance. In Iran, qanat irrigation networks and courtyard houses institutionalised collective water sharing and microclimatic control, a pattern described in Hassan Fathi's "*Architecture for the Poor*" (1976) and further contextualised in Nematollah Fazeli's "*Cultural Heritage of Iran*" (2019). Timurid Samarkand and Bukhara display urban geometries and monumental axes that regulated circulation and social interaction, themes explored by Oleg Grabar in "*The Mediation of Ornament*" (1992) and by Eckart Ehlers in "*Urban Sustainability in Central Asia*" (2017). Azerbaijan preserved courtyard typologies and garden courts that mediated public and private life, analysed in Mammadova's "*Islamic Architecture in Azerbaijan*" (2020). These regional practices combined hydraulic engineering, shaded public space and market logics to reduce heat stress,

conserve water and maintain social cohesion. As merchants and administrators moved across these territories they carried organisational templates such as caravanserai, chahar bagh and waqf endowments that were adaptable to local ecologies. The persistence of respective templates demonstrates that sustainable urban techniques were transmissible technologies linked to ethical norms. Contemporary heritage and renewal projects in these countries show how historic systems can be reactivated to meet current environmental challenges.

2.2.3) Mughal Practice and Architectural Representation

The Mughal polity synthesised Persianate and Timurid material vocabularies into a comprehensive urban technology that combined symbolism with practical governance. Catherine B. Asher's "*Architecture of Mughal India*" (1992) documents how palace plans, garden schemes and civic arteries were conceived as integrated ensembles serving ritual, administrative and climatic functions. George Michell and Mumtaz Currim's "*Majesty of Mughal Decoration*" (2007) shows that ornamental programmes worked as social pedagogy by embedding vegetal and geometric patterns that signalled ecological order. Moritz Herrmann in "*Mughal Architecture*" (2011) analyses institutional mechanisms such as waqf endowments and public fountains which provided sustained funding for sanitation, water points and pilgrim facilities. D. Fairchild Ruggles in "*Islamic Gardens and Landscapes*" (2011) demonstrates that the chahar bagh was simultaneously a paradise metaphor, a rainwater harvesting device and a shade system that moderated urban climate. Mughal bazaars, caravanserais and hammams illustrate how circulation, commerce and hygiene were organised together to support urban resilience. These authors present empirical cases where sacred symbolism translated into hydraulics, maintenance regimes and social provisioning. The Mughal record therefore constitutes a replicable model for aligning civic ethics and technical design in environments comparable to the Indus basin.

2.2.4) Pakistan's Contemporary Gaps and Constitutional Context

Despite this inherited repertoire Pakistan's metropolitan practice reveals significant discontinuities between tradition and contemporary urbanisation. Rapid, market driven expansion has prioritised land speculation and road-based mobility over public water infrastructure and shaded communal spaces, producing shortages, pollution and spatial inequality in cities such as Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar. Institutional fragmentation across federal, provincial and municipal bodies weakens coordinated management of water, waste and heritage assets. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 contains provisions that can be mobilised to recover ethical urban governance: Article 2A and the Objectives Resolution insert a duty to order the state in conformity with Islamic principles; Article 31 mandates promotion of an Islamic way of life; Article 37(g) directs protection and improvement of environment and natural resources; Article 38 requires equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities; and Article 9 protects the right to life which courts have interpreted to include environmental quality. Statutory instruments such as the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997 and policy frameworks including the National Conservation Strategy provide legal instruments for intervention but face enforcement and capacity constraints. Landmark judicial decisions, for example Shehla Zia v WAPDA (1994), have read environmental rights into Article 9 thereby creating jurisprudential support for action. The challenge therefore is not absence of normative resources but institutional will and technical capacity to translate constitutional and scriptural imperatives into urban governance, financing and civic design (Asim, 2025).

2.3) Integrated Spiritual-Urban Framework

Integrated Spiritual-Urban Framework is an interdisciplinary model that synthesises faith-based stewardship with contemporary sustainability practice. It conceptualises the city as a moral ecosystem where architecture, governance and community welfare operate as instruments of custodianship rather than extraction. The framework asserts that religious precepts provide durable normative resources which can be operationalised through urban design, governance instruments and civic institutions. Methodologically it bridges comparative theology with eco-urban theory to translate metaphysical obligations into policy levers and design criteria. This model therefore positions spiritual ethics as a practical toolkit for resilient urban renewal rather than as a purely rhetorical resource (Asim, 2025).

2.3.1) Scriptural Foundations

The principal scriptures of the region articulate doctrines that justify treating the environment as a trust to be guarded and conserved. The Quran presents humans as stewards and cautions against corrupting the earth, for example in the injunction that men were appointed as vicegerents and stewards on earth (Quran 2:30) and in the warning not to spread corruption on the earth (Quran 2:11 and 7:56). The notion of amanah is reinforced in Quran 33:72 where the trust was offered to mankind. The Avesta prescribes ritual measures to keep earth, water and fire pure and contains instructions on safeguarding water resources in the Vendidad (Vendidad 6:47-48). The Milinda Panha articulates the Middle Path as an ethic of moderation that restrains consumption and favours communal balance, referenced in Book III Question 10. The Guru Granth Sahib equates environmental elements with spiritual guides, asserting that air is the Guru and water the Father, which morally compels protection of these elements (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 8). Examining themes of respective religious advises commonly indicate that, these passages construct a coherent mandate for stewardship, restriction of waste, equitable resource sharing and institutionalised care which the Integrated Spiritual-Urban Framework translates into governance and design prescriptions. The textual warrant therefore legitimises institutional mechanisms such as endowments for public water, communal gardens and ordinances against pollution within a culturally resonant discourse.

2.3.2) Regional Practices in Contiguous Civilisational Spaces

These scriptural mandates have historically informed practical urban systems across Iran, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and continue to shape selective contemporary interventions. In Iran the qanat networks institutionalised shared water governance and domestic cooling strategies, detailed in Hassan Fathi's "*Architecture for the Poor*" (1976) and revisited in Nematollah Fazeli's "*Cultural Heritage of Iran*" (2019). Timurid urbanism in Samarkand and Bukhara developed axial geometries and shaded public spaces that regulated circulation and social interaction as discussed by Oleg Grabar in "*The Mediation of Ornament*" (1992) and by Eckart Ehlers in "*Urban Sustainability in Central Asia*" (2017). Azerbaijan's courtyard typologies and garden courts preserve public private mediation and microclimatic control, described in Mammadova's "*Islamic Architecture in Azerbaijan*" (2020). Across these territories waqf like endowments, caravanserai networks and caravan routes embedded social provisioning and environmental maintenance into urban economics. Contemporary heritage initiatives in these states demonstrate revival of hydraulic techniques, adaptive reuse of historic gardens and integration of traditional shading in modern retrofits. These practices demonstrate that spiritual ethics were operational technologies of urban sustainability that can be reactivated under present governance frameworks. The regional examples therefore validate the feasibility of translating religious stewardship into contemporary policy and design.

2.3.3) Mughal Practice and Architectural Representation

The Mughal urban repertoire gives a clear historical precedent for integrating spiritual values with pragmatic urban systems. Catherine B. Asher in "*Architecture of Mughal India*" (1992) shows that Mughal city planning integrated ceremonial axes, water infrastructure and public amenities into coherent ensembles designed for civic order. George Michell and Mumtaz Currim in Majesty of "*Mughal Decoration*" (2007) argue that ornamentation and vegetal motifs communicated ethical narratives about human relation to nature. Moritz Herrmann's "*Mughal Architecture*" (2011) documents institutional practices such as waqf endowments for public fountains, sarais and hospitals which sustained sanitation and hospitality. D. Fairchild Ruggles in "*Islamic Gardens and Landscapes*" (2011) demonstrates that the chahar bagh served as both paradise metaphor and rainwater management system that moderated local microclimate. Mughal bazaars and caravanserais organised trade routes and social safety nets which reduced urban precarity and distributed resources. The Mughal record therefore delivers practical instruments -- endowments, garden hydraulics, shaded markets and institutional provisioning -- that operationalise spiritual stewardship within urban governance. Contemporary adaptation of these instruments can provide Pakistan with historically grounded, climate responsive interventions.

2.3.4) Pakistan's Contemporary Gaps and Constitutional Context

Pakistan currently manifests partial continuities alongside major gaps in institutionalising stewardship-oriented urbanism. Urban expansion has prioritised road centric mobility and speculative land use which has degraded water tables, removed communal green space and increased heat stress in cities such as Karachi and Lahore. Institutional fragmentation between federal, provincial and municipal tiers limits integrated water and heritage management. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 provides explicit normative resources that can support stewardship policies: Article 2A and the Objectives Resolution enshrine Islamic values in state policy, Article 31 directs promotion of an Islamic way of life, Article 37(g) obliges protection and improvement of environment and natural resources, Article 38 requires equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities and Article 9 secures the right to life which courts have interpreted to include environmental quality. Statutory instruments such as the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997 and policy documents like the National Conservation Strategy exist but face enforcement and financing shortfalls. Judicial precedents, notably Shehla Zia v WAPDA 1994, expanded environmental protection under Article 9 and created legal grounds for remedial measures. The principal barriers are governance capacity, competing political priorities and fiscal constraints rather than absence of legal or moral mandate. Corrective action therefore requires institutional strengthening, budgetary reallocation and the operational translation of constitutional and scriptural mandates into municipal codes, waqf based financing models and heritage centred climate adaptations (Asim, 2025).

3) Policy Prescriptions for Pakistan

When this study applies all the three models, "Comparative Religious Urban Ethics", "Historical-Geographical Urban Continuities" and "Integrated Spiritual-Urban Framework", it recommends certain policy initiatives that can overcome administrative gaps regarding endorsing environmentally sustainable model of urban development in Pakistan on equality-bases, such as;

- Launch a national civic socialisation campaign that frames stewardship as public duty and practice. Use mass media, mosque and madrassa programmes, school-community activities and local festivals to normalise waste separation, water conservation and public space care. Pair messaging

with visible municipal actions such as street cleaning, community gardens and repaired fountains so citizens see policy matched by performance. Measure impact through baseline surveys and quarterly municipal scorecards to ensure verifiable progress (Asim, 2025).

- Redesign the school curriculum from primary level upward to institutionalise civic competence and community engagement. Introduce a compulsory subject on "*Civic and Community Engagement*" for years 6 to 8 which trains pupils in local history, comparative civilisational heritage, participatory budgeting and basic environmental science. Ensure pedagogic materials show how Pakistan's heritage, for example Mughal gardens and qanat logic, link to global models such as Singapore's housing and Copenhagen's cycling culture so learners can compare domestic assets with international practice. Assess pupils through project work that requires local field research and community service hours so learning translates into action (Asim, 2025).
- Reform teacher education and inspection so schools can deliver the new civic subject effectively. Create teacher training modules on comparative civilisational ethics and experiential pedagogy so instructors can guide site visits to bazaars, gardens and municipal works. Align inspection criteria to evaluate not only academic outcomes but community engagement projects and sustainability initiatives. Provide modest performance grants to schools that demonstrate measurable community impact (Asim, 2025).
- Recast the role of municipal administrations and city development authorities from builders to custodians. Redefine mandates so local authorities have clear responsibility for water security, green cover, sanitation and heritage upkeep. Allocate multi-year capital envelopes for maintenance of public assets and introduce ring-fenced funds derived from user fees and waqf style endowments to fund fountains, public baths and parks. Institute professional urban management cadres within cities with fixed-term contracts and merit-based promotion tied to performance indicators (Asim, 2025).
- Strengthen local government law to improve vertical clarity and fiscal autonomy. Devolve revenue powers for municipal services so cities can plan multi-year investments, and require provincial oversight limited to fiduciary audit rather than routine interference. Introduce performance contracts between provincial governments and municipal executives that specify service levels, timelines and sanctions for non-delivery (Asim, 2025).
- Impose strict accountability and transparent sanctioning for negligence. Mandate public asset registers and open municipal dashboards that report real time data on water supply, waste collection and green cover. Require independent municipal auditors and citizen complaint panels with powers to trigger administrative inquiries and financial penalties. Make poor management a ground for administrative removal under clear rules so accountability is swift, visible and enforceable (Asim, 2025).
- Adopt evidence based urban design standards that reuse regionally proven techniques. Mandate shaded market arcades, public fountains and courtyard housing in new developments in hot arid zones. Require mandatory on-site stormwater retention, tree canopy quotas and passive cooling measures inspired by Persian garden hydraulics and Mughal chahar bagh logic. Incorporate incremental housing regulations so informal settlements can be upgraded rather than cleared, preserving social networks while delivering sanitation and drainage (Asim, 2025).

- Mobilise Islamic philanthropic instruments for urban public goods. Scale waqf and zakat directed funds to finance public water projects, restoration of communal gardens and low-cost sanitation. Create transparent public-private-philanthropic partnerships where waqf funds cofinance municipal maintenance trusts with professional management. Learn from historical Mughal waqf practices where endowments funded fountains, hospitals and caravanserais and adapt governance safeguards to ensure modern fiduciary discipline (Asim, 2025).
- Use comparative international models as operational templates not blueprints. Adopt Curitiba's rapid transit and land use linkage for mid-sized Pakistani cities, replicate Freiburg's neighbourhood energy and participatory planning for greenfield districts, and adapt Singaporean housing policy where public provision of mixed income housing is politically feasible. From the Muslim world, study Istanbul's heritage regeneration and Morocco's urban rehabilitation projects for blended conservation and livelihoods strategies. Pilot one demonstrator district per province to test integrated interventions before scale up (Asim, 2025).
- Institutionalise research, monitoring and local capacity building. Create city level Urban Sustainability Units within universities that co-manage pilots with municipalities, collect longitudinal data and train municipal staff in maintenance economics. Fund policy fellowships to translate comparative civilisational ethics into municipal bylaws and design codes. Publish annual Urban Stewardship Reports to track progress and inform voters (Asim, 2025).
- Prioritise law and policy coherence to transform constitutional and scriptural obligations into municipal practice. Use constitutional provisions on social justice and environment as legal basis to mandate municipal duties and budgetary commitments. Draft model municipal codes that operationalise equitable access to water, waste services and public space as enforceable rights rather than aspirational goals. Ensure judiciary and ombuds institutions are briefed with empirical data so legal remedies for environmental harms are practicable (Asim, 2025).
- Sequence reforms for political and fiscal realism. Start with low-cost high visibility measures such as school civic projects, municipal dashboards and waqf financed park restorations to build public confidence. Use early wins to justify legislative changes and larger fiscal reallocations. Maintain clear timelines, transparent metrics and an institutional learning loop so policy adapts to evidence (Asim, 2025).
- Emphasise behavioural design and habit formation. Combine normative education with default options such as kerbside recycling, automatic irrigation systems controlled by municipalities and standardised public toilet units to shift behaviour at scale. Use modest incentives, for example reduced municipal fees for neighbourhoods that meet green cover targets, and public recognition to sustain participation (Asim, 2025).
- Conclude with an integrated governance principle. Treat urban sustainability as a policy of custodianship that requires coordinated education, institutional reform, fiscal innovation and civic mobilisation. This framework bridges Pakistan's historical resources with proven global practice and provides a feasible pathway to resilient cities that are both environmentally sound and ethically rooted (Asim, 2025).

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