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Peace and Interfaith dialogue: role of Barcelona Muslim Community

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ABSTRACT: The peace building efforts of the Muslim community in Barcelona is evident from the fact that they demonstrated unity after the twin terrorist attacks which hit the city of Barcelona in 2017. The study has determined to analyze whether interfaith dialogue can play an instrumental role in fostering peace, highlight the efforts and contributions rendered by Muslims for initiating interfaith dialogue and identify different challenges for effective interfaith dialogue in Barcelona. It is a qualitative study therefore I have conducted structured interviews with eighteen (18) people in Barcelona for primary data collection. In order to analyze the interviews, I employed thematic analysis tool to accomplish the data interpretation process. Findings also revealed the significance and need of interfaith Dialogue and explicated the role of Muslim community and obstructed challenge for peace building and interfaith dialogue in the case of Barcelona. For Future studies can attempt to explore the role of Muslim community in peace building in Spain.

KEYWORDS: Peacebuilding, Interfaith dialogue, Barcelona Muslim Community (BMC)

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Abstract:

The peace building efforts of the Muslim community in Barcelona is evident from the fact that they demonstrated unity after the twin terrorist attacks which hit the city of Barcelona in 2017. The study has determined to analyze whether interfaith dialogue can play an instrumental role in fostering peace, highlight the efforts and contributions rendered by Muslims for initiating interfaith dialogue and identify different challenges for effective interfaith dialogue in Barcelona. It is a qualitative study therefore I have conducted structured interviews with eighteen (18) people in Barcelona for primary data collection. In order to analyze the interviews, I employed thematic analysis tool to accomplish the data interpretation process. Findings also revealed the significance and need of interfaith Dialogue and explicated the role of Muslim community and obstructed challenge for peace building and interfaith dialogue in the case of Barcelona. For Future studies can attempt to explore the role of Muslim community in peace building in Spain.

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1. Introduction

The Muslims have been living in Spain for over a millennium. This entire period has witnessed the rise and fall of the Muslim Spain. Throughout the years, the majority Muslim communities have been settled in the autonomous community of Andalusia* Andalusia is the southernmost autonomous community in Peninsular Spain. and Catalonia (Berger, 2015). The Muslim community has contributed to the economy, prosperity, development, culture, peace, religious harmony and social welfare of Spain in general and Catalonia in particular (Morera, 2016). After 2004 Madrid and 2017 Barcelona terror attacks, the Muslim community has witnessed anti-Islamic sentiments. This had led to a sense of insecurity and discrimination among the Muslim population living in Barcelona. Although the cause of racial discrimination against Muslims has been supported by both electronic and print media yet certain media houses have propagated stereotyping, Islamophobia, and racial discrimination against Muslim. As a response to 2017 terror attacks, the Muslim community of Barcelona organized rallies to condemn the terror attacks and joined peace march to express solidarity with the families of the victims (Bruton, 2017).

In the backdrop of this scenario, in order to promote integration and counter extremism in the society, there is a need for a constructive dialogue aimed at building peace through interfaith dialogue. There is a dire need to integrate the culturally, linguistically, religiously and ethnically diverse Muslims and non-Muslims under the umbrella of interfaith dialogue to ensure religious and cultural harmony and pave way for peace. The far-right disgruntled elements within a society irrespective of their religious or political affiliation easily fall prey to the heinous designs of radical groups and are used to their advantage (Georgiadou, 2013). The tenets of peace and interfaith dialogue encourage social cohesion for such discontent groups to ensure integration & peace in the society and combat the ultimate extremism (Cox, Orsborn & Sisk, 2014).

Although several studies have been conducted to investigate the role of interfaith dialogue in establishing peace in different countries, however, very few studies have attempted to examine the role of Muslims in building peace through interfaith dialogue in Spain. No single study has been specifically conducted

to examine the role of Barcelona Muslim Community in establishing peace through interfaith dialogue. Keeping in view the growing gravity of the Islamophobia, stereotyping and racial discrimination against Muslims, there is a dire need to integrate a diverse society through interfaith dialogue. This study is conducted with the aim to fill this gap and contribute to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the contributions, role and efforts of Barcelona Muslim Community in building peace through promotion of interfaith dialogue.

The present study attempts to highlight the overall efforts of Muslim community dwelling in Barcelona. The study is further focused to evaluate the contributions of Muslim community in establishing interfaith harmony, peaceful coexistence in a multiracial and multicultural diverse society leading to peace in Catalonia in general and in Barcelona in particular. The study is further concentrated to analyze the role of Muslim community in maintaining unity in the society amid growing Islamophobia and abhorrence fanned by far-right nationalist elements in Barcelona. The study also attempted to assess the level of intensity of anti-Islamic sentiments in the pre and post 2004 Madrid and 2017 Barcelona attacks period. The study has highlighted the endeavors of Muslim in building peace, promoting mutual coexistence and tolerance in Barcelona.

The study is significant in the sense that it will highlight the efforts of Muslim community for peace building and interfaith dialogue in Barcelona. It will contribute to the existing literary scholarships as very limited research has been conducted on this topic. The policy makers, politicians, think tanks and different government departments can generalize the findings of this study to other Muslims majority communities of Spain. Moreover, the recommendations of the study can be considered for incorporations in future policies by the policy makers, legislators and politicians. The findings of the study will help in identifying the areas of conflicts and areas of cooperation where Muslims and non-Muslims can cooperate with each other and create an environment of peace in Barcelona. The outcome of the study will provided help to faith-based actors involved in interfaith dialogue representing different organizations, institutions, members of different communities, advocacy groups, civil society, IGOs, NGOs, and peace activists.

2. Literature review

In recent decades, the concept of interfaith conversation has acquired international popularity and has been advocated as a critical component for religious harmony. Interfaith dialogue is a term which has been utilized to describe a wide array of activities and efforts that occur in various terrestrial, social, political and religious settings. The religious transformation in Spain has been very exceptional and swift throughout decades (Griera, 2020). During the reign of Franco dictatorship, the Spain was defined by Catholic predominance, which ultimately crumbled in the final decades of the twentieth century. Following the Franco's demise, the successive governments provided religious liberty to minorities and extended freedom of conscience equally to all new religious communities. (Rozenburg, 1996; & Perez-Agote, 2015).

The Spanish religious transition has conformed to the emergence of religious identities worldwide. The very global religious change with particular reference to Spain has brought religion-induced terrorism in the form of terrorist attacks which were carried out in Madrid and in Barcelona. The interfaith dialogue has become a priority item for both the politicians and media amidst the surfacing of far-right populism and the inception of Islamophobia (Asotr, Griera and Cornejo, 2019). From sociological standpoint, it is difficult to recognize Spain as religious actuality. (Halilovic, 2017). The religious account of Spain can be narrated in converse fashion. For one thing, its religious past can be delineated by placing focus on diversified religious history owing to its geographic location between the continent of Africa and Europe (Enterra, 2017). The subsistence of Al Andulas and the renowned interlude of peaceful cohabitation among Muslims, Jewish and Christians act as to demonstrate this narrative (Jesus, Mata and Epalza, 2007).

The current religious make-up of Spain has also undergone transition due to increase in the germination of religious minorities. At present, religious minorities perform worship in 7234 different places of worship in Spain (Griera, 2017). Majority of these prayer centres have been established in the last twenty years. In addition to worship places of Catholicism having highest number of churches in Spain, the number of Evangelic churches follows the second place with 4238 churches dispersed nationwide (Lopez, 2019). On the other hand, majority places of Muslim worship are located in the region of Catalonia and Andalusia. The estimated number of Muslim places of worship is close to 1632 (Montilla and Ferrandiz, 2018). Majority population of Muslims in Spain is originated from Morocco. Having said this, Muslims of other ethnicities from Asian countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh including revert Muslims also constitute a substantial portion of Muslim population in Spain (Stasio, Lancee, Veit and Yeman, 2019). The places of worships of

Jehovah's, Orthodox Churches and Buddhists which are placed at second, third and fourth position respectively with 600, 216 and 171 places of worship (Velasco, 2010).

The standards of interfaith dialogue are directed at the capacity to regard the variety of beliefs to distinguish similar religious experience and receptiveness to disagreements via the exercise of expository and collaborative citizenship (Breskaya, Francis, and Giordan, 2020). According to Martin (2005), peace is a condition of congruity or the absence of antagonism. Peace can likewise mean a non-violent lifestyle. Peace is also utilized to denote the ceasing of brutality. (Royce, 2009). The tenets of peace and interfaith dialogue encourage social cohesion for such discontent groups to ensure integration & peace in the society and combat the ultimate extremism (Cox, Orsborn & Sisk, 2014).

The ultimate goal of interfaith dialogue is to enhance mutual trust, respect and establish a feeling of cohesion through improved compassion (Marbaniang, 2018). Interfaith dialogue can only turn out to be fruitful provided the participants of the dialogue process are well-versed in their respective religious beliefs which subsequently permit them to solemnly consider the religious faiths and rituals of others. It differs from typical dialogue process since it utilizes spirituality as a primary reference of dedication to social transition (Bakkevig, 2016). Dispensation of religious emblems and traditions allow individuals to gain an insight into profound emotional and religious truth regarding those who are embroiled in conflict. It mobilized community, garner assistance for inclusive peace building process and change a hostile and malevolent dispute into a fruitful resolution (Franda, 2016). The inclusion of religious clerics in the peace building and interfaith dialogue process and their subsequent support for global disputes facilitate in inspiring faiths and resolution. (Uysal, 2016).

Interfaith dialogue is focused on assisting a transition from puritan, hostile, and biased perception to a more optimistic and unbiased outlook. It is focused on promoting learning, elucidates misperceptions, and creates chances for instrumental liaison among people of different faiths. It can also integrate distinct groups to overcome cliché and false portrayal of a certain religious minority (Abu-Nimer, Welty, and Khoury, 2007). Interfaith dialogue can help in persuading hope, constructing confidence for confronting sturdy problems, building a feeling of social involvement, creating platforms of positive engagement, altering conflicts, urges forgiveness, promote arbitration and resolving a particular conundrum by involving religious communities. It can also impart trainings on a particular theme such as dispute resolution. Irrespective of the objectives of dialogue process, it is mandatory to create and communicate an explicit purpose to partakers of interfaith dialogue process (Headley, 2020).

The 1992 Summer Olympic Games proved instrumental in expanding interfaith connections among people. While continuing the same tradition, in the early 1990s, an '*Interfaith Commission*' was created (Haynes and Hennig, 2011). The commission was productive in nurturing partnerships and deliberations among members of religious groups emanated from major cities of Spain (Pratt, 2020). This commission served as a precursor for the creation of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) association for Interreligious Dialogue. This association is officially called AUDIR and was setup in 1999. The AUDIR is perceived as basic level association focused on integrating representatives of diverse religious communities (Vila, Freixa and Aneas, 2020). It provided the basis and impetus to the '*Parliament of World's Religion*' which was commemorated in the 'Universal Forum of Cultures' took place in 2004 at Barcelona. AUDIR has supported several interfaith dialogue initiatives at the basic level in different regions such as Catalonia, Balearic Islands and Valencia (Griera, 2012). At the moment, *Xarxa Catalana d'Entitats de Diàleg Interreligiós* which is overseen by UNESCO-CAT has encompassed nineteen different organizations under its umbrella and has been proactive in arranging biannually Catalan Interfaith Parliament. It is working scope is focused on encouraging religious cohabitation and acknowledgement of religious assortment (Greira, 2002).

The *Xarxa Catalana d'Entitats de Diàleg Interreligiós* which is known as Catalan Network of Entities of Interreligious Dialogue (CNEIR) has instituted a decisive exercise of encouraging associations of interfaith dialogue to arrange seminars under for different interest groups (CREA, 2021). By taking into account different interests, the dialogue is classified on the basis of age, gender and profession. Several other organizations akin to CNEIR have been founded in other parts of Spain namely Andalusia, Canary Islands and Basque Country. A great number of organizations working on the domain of interfaith dialogue have been constituted after the Universal Forum of Cultures held in 2004 and the 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid (Burchianti and Itcaina, 2007). According to the official statistics, around fifty (50) different organizations are working on the subject-matter of interfaith dialogue (Torradeflot, 2014).

The total population of Catalonia is 7.5 million. Presently, around 450,000 Muslims are residing in

Catalonia which constitutes 6% of the total population. A substantial influx of immigrants who have entered Catalonia either through legal or illegal means are originated from North African and Southeast Asian countries. The population of Pakistani immigrants close to 60,000 is living in Barcelona (Checa and Nel-lo, 2021). The city of Barcelona is one of the densely populated cities in Europe and has been ranked as the sixth populous cities in EU after Paris. According to recent statistics, the overall population of Barcelona is closed to 5,625,498. It is the capital city of Catalonia. Barcelona is also home to inhabitants who have migrated from Italy, China, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Morocco (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). Keeping in view the diverse ethnic population living in Catalonia, the city of Barcelona is conditioned to a substantial demographic variation. Out of 450,000 Muslim population of Barcelona, 105,293 Muslims are Barcelona born Spanish while 344,707 Muslims have emigrated from different countries of Africa and Asia. Around 70,000 Muslim students are studying in different academic institution in Barcelona. There are 264 centres of Muslim worship in Barcelona (Badcock, 2017).

The Muslims have been living in Spain for over a millennium. This entire period has witnessed the rise and fall of the Muslim Spain. Throughout the years, the majority Muslim communities have been settled in the autonomous community of Andalusia and Catalonia (Berger, 2015). The Muslim community immediately responded to the 2017 terror attacks. They organized rallies against the heinous act of barbarism which resulted in the deaths of 13 people and 130 people were injured (Bruton, 2017). The Barcelona Muslims community expressed their solidarity with the bereaved families and conveyed a message of unity and peace to the rest of the world. They held placards, posters and banners and condemned the terrorist attack in Barcelona. Muslims from different walks of life participated in the rally to protest against the barbaric incident which claimed several lives (Dewan, 2017). The Muslims condemned the attack from different platforms such as mosques, TV, Radio and in public squares. They delivered the message that Islam is a religion of peace and Muslims are peace loving nation. They also made it evident to the world that Muslims are not terrorists and they are against terrorism. The Muslims also raised their voices through different advocacy groups and Non-governmental Organizations (Baynes, 2017).

To serve the cause of peace building, the Muslims have taken some initiatives of peace building through interfaith dialogue. Certain organizations including the Muslim places of worships are instrumental in spreading the message of peace in Barcelona (Utrera, 2017). The prominent associations that are engaged in interfaith dialogue and peace building include, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious & Intercultural Dialogue-KAICIID (Reuters, 2019), Centre Cultura Islamic Catala (Douh, 2017), Minhaj-Ul-Quran Spain (United States Institute of Peace, 2010), Centre Islamiac de Barcelona, Islamic Relief Espana, Islamic Cultural Center Al-Tauba, Centre Islamic Al-Qaim, Dawat-e-Islami Masjid, Fundacion Andra, Minhaj-Ul-Quran Women League, and Pakistan federacion de Espana and Catalan Association for Morocco Women (Tribune, 2021). These organizations are engaged in different peace building efforts in Barcelona by arranging different seminars and conferences to raise awareness about interfaith dialogue and reconciliation of faiths (Enterria, 2010).

During the course of living together for several centuries with non-Muslims, the Barcelona Muslim community has become the part and parcel of Catalonia region. They are interwoven into the social fabric of Barcelona. The Muslim community of Barcelona in collaboration with Santa Anna Church opened the doors of Church in the month of Ramadan and invited everyone to join them at the breakfast table (Rubio, and Castillejam 2021). They have organized several conferences and activities aimed at interfaith dialogue and peace building in collaboration with Generalitat de Catalunya, The International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas, Barcelona City Council (BCC) and Church of Santa Anna in Barcelona. The Parliament of Catalonia has elected its first-ever female Muslim member of parliament in 2017 elections. She is also a strong advocate for peace activism and support minority rights (Soler, 2019).

After 2004 Madrid and 2017 Barcelona terror attacks, the Muslim community has witnessed anti-Islamic sentiments. This had led to a sense of insecurity and discrimination among the Muslim population living in Barcelona. Although the cause of racial discrimination against Muslims has been supported by both electronic and print media yet certain media houses have propagated stereotyping, Islamophobia, and racial discrimination against Muslim. The Muslim community wasn't anticipating a fierce reaction from non-Muslims and particularly Spaniards after Barcelona terror attacks. Besides this, the mosques were also targeted by the far-right extremist. They painted the Muslim places of worships with graffiti, and hurled flares into the mosque's premises. A mosque in Granada was also attacked in similar manner (Cervi, 2020).

A certain segment of media has played a very hostile role to sabotage the image of Muslims not only in Spain but also all over the world. This has also led to identity crisis and radicalization of Muslims by extremist groups and fanatic clerics. The hate speech, xenophobia, Islamophobia and discrimination are amongst several factors which are responsible for extremism, radicalization and the growing terrorism related incidents in Barcelona.

Sense of insecurity, isolation and stereotypes, racism, marginalization, and maltreatment are major factors that contribute to disequilibrium in the society and ultimately pave way for brutal incidents. The radical groups use these reasons as a plea to justify their barbaric acts (Vicent, Otero, Lopez and Pardo, 2010).

3. Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature and is based on Interpretivist research philosophy and ontological research paradigm. Interpretivism assists in understanding the differences among people pertinent to their role as social actors (Edirisinha, 2012). The research approach adopted in this study is deductive approach since it is based on the observations and experiences of the respondents. The present study is academic, descriptive, qualitative research and focused on the profound observations and elucidation of the research problem.

In order to formulate the conceptual framework for this study, I conducted thorough desk study and exhausted different sources. This study has analyzed the literature in the post 9/11 incident relevant to the topic such as the 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures organized in Madrid, Spain the terror attacks that occurred in Madrid in 2004 and in Barcelona in 2017. The proposed literature has examined the relationship between peace and interfaith dialogue, the role and response of Barcelona Muslim Community (BMC) to these terror incidents, the initiatives taken by Barcelona Muslim community for peace building via interfaith dialogue and the contributions the Muslims community has rendered for Barcelona.

3.1 Population of the Study

The population of this study is Catalonia region. It is comprised of four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona (Huyuk, 2017). I have selected only Barcelona as the sample size of my research.

3.2 Sampling Technique

A sampling technique or strategy is a tool utilized by a researcher to collect planned observations from a substantial population (Taherdoost, 2016). I have used stratified sampling technique in this research to determine the final sample size and have selected the final respondents for interviews on random basis in proportion to divergent tiny groups.

3.3 Sample size

The sample size (Barcelona Muslim community) has been divided into three separate strata on the basis of demographics, education, profession, gender, ethnicity etc. The sample size determined for this study is comprised of 18 respondents based on the constituted strata.

3.4 Sources of Data

The major data sources of this study has been divided into two categories i.e., primary data and secondary data. The primary data for this study has been collected through structured interviews. The secondary data has been collected through textbooks, newspapers, research articles, dissertations, periodicals, journals, magazines, websites, annual reports, policy briefs, newsletters and digital library.

4. Analysis and Findings

I conducted structured interviews with eighteen (18) people as part of qualitative research design. Primary data was collected through structured interviews for this research. The transcript for every single interview was generated and was organized with respect to respondents. Most interviews have been conducted in Spanish language, therefore, after preparing the transcript, the original interviews transcripts were translated into English language. The response to every interview question was organized in a tabulated form. In order to analyze the interviews, I employed thematic analysis tool in order to accomplish the data interpretation process. As contended by Braun and Clark (2006), the qualitative data obtained

through interviews is examined so that common, meanings, themes and different pattern of thoughts which emerge during interviews can be identified. The process of thematic analysis involves different stages such as text codification, emergence of themes, labeling of themes, preparation transcription of interviews text, and reporting the final themes.

4.1 Codification of Interviews Text

The responses of all interviewees were codified in order to create ease in data analysis and to ensure confidentiality of the respondents. During the course of analyzing the interviews text, certain themes emerged which have been analyzed to facilitate the data interpretation. I allocated different codes to the text excerpted from all interviews before further analyzing them. The text was further divided into sub-categories which represented a specific theme. The very themes were generated during the course of qualitative data analysis process and were labeled. In addition to labeling the themes, the actual names of interviewers were deciphered in order to protect their confidentiality; I assigned different code names to the interviewees. A detailed list containing information regarding the respondents is provided in Annexure "B". The primary data collected through structured interview schedule have generated different major themes. Majority respondents cooperated well during the interview and shared very fruitful information regarding the research topic. These themes have been classified into different sections and have been labeled to ensure convenience in interpretation. These major themes are:

- a. Cognizance of Peace and Interfaith dialogue
- b. Perception of Non-Muslims towards Barcelona Muslim Community
- c. The Importance and need of Interfaith dialogue in Barcelona
- d. Role of Barcelona Muslim Community in peace building & Interfaith dialogue
- e. Problems faced by Barcelona Muslims Community
- f. Challenges to Peace building and Interfaith dialogue in Barcelona

4.2 Cognizance of Peace and Interfaith dialogue

After analyzing all the interviews, I have deduced that all eighteen respondents had mix viewpoints regarding their understanding about the concept of peace and interfaith dialogue. Majority respondents held similar views with the exception of few who had formed different opinion about the concept and interfaith dialogue as compared to the majority respondents of the study. Around three (3) respondents correlated the understanding of peace with absence of violence, aggression and war while fifteen (15) respondents juxtaposed the concept of peace with religion. Three interviewees had a very little knowledge about interfaith dialogue. They were naïve about interfaith dialogue process in the technical sense. Sixteen (16) interviewees held the opinion that there is a dire need for peace and interfaith dialogue amidst growing Islamophobia, xenophobia, far right extremist tendencies and radicalization. Based on the data analyzed from the interviews, it has been extrapolated that the respondents based in Barcelona were cognizant with the concept of peace and interfaith dialogue with respect to their own level of understanding.

4.3 Perception of Non-Muslims towards Barcelona Muslim Community

From the recorded responses of the respondents, it has been analyzed that Muslims have been wrongly perceived by the Spaniards in Barcelona. This wrong perception has been established due to different terrorism related incidents carried out by radical and extremists Muslims in different parts of the world. The incident of 9/11 in New York, 2004 Madrid terrorist attack, 7/7 bombings in London and the 2017 Barcelona terrorist attacks made Muslims vulnerable to Islamophobia, xenophobia, prejudice, hatred, radicalization and extremism. Some Muslims respondents expressed that they are perceived as second class citizens in Barcelona. They experience racism in their routine lives in Barcelona. In addition to this, Muslims have been also discriminated on the grounds of faith. According to Interviewee 1, she has been a victim of racism as the Spaniards have made fun of her hijab and have passed derogatory remarks against her religion. Even one respondent added that non-Muslims particularly Spaniards in Barcelona have very little understanding about people of different faith residing in Barcelona. He further clarified that Sikh men wear beard and turbans and therefore are mistaken as Muslims in Barcelona.

4.4 Importance of Interfaith dialogue

In a time when the world is engulfed by waves of terrorism, regional conflicts, ethnic cleansing, genocides, extremism, radicalization, violence, chaos, political and economic divisions, interfaith

dialogue seems to be an effective panacea to integrate people of diverse religious beliefs on a single platform to foster unity, promote peace, integration, and tolerance for each other religion. Interfaith dialogue is need of the hour in a multicultural society such as Barcelona in order to avoid religious conflicts, violence, extremism and ensure sustainable peace. All eighteen (18) respondents of the study advocated the need for interfaith dialogue when asked the question about the importance of interfaith dialogue. After analyzing the interviews, it has been disclosed that Islam has been negatively portrayed by a particular segment of media. Islam has been wrongly projected by the media as a religion which promotes extremism and indoctrinates people to instigate violence. The true image of Islam hasn't been shown to the people living in Europe and in North America.

On the whole, most respondents acknowledged the importance of interfaith dialogue in a multicultural and multi-religious society such as Barcelona. Interfaith dialogue serves as a platform for amending the distorted image of Muslims negatively propagated by a certain section of biased media to defame Islam and its followers namely Muslims. On other hand, the apprehensions, and reservations of the non-Muslim community who grudges against Muslim community in Barcelona can be best addressed through interfaith dialogue. Each side is lack proper understanding of each other's religion and therefore, the need for interfaith is extremely crucial in such circumstance. By taking into account the growing importance of interfaith dialogue in establishing peace, it is about high time in Barcelona to embark upon such an initiative to lay the foundation for a steppingstone which will lead to the path of everlasting peace. It is a pacific mean of settling disputes and contributes to social cohesion, counters extremism, and establishes the tradition of reconciliation for combatting mutual differences.

4.5 Role of Barcelona Muslim Community in peace building & interfaith dialogue

The Muslims have been living peacefully in Barcelona for several centuries. The recent second and third generation of Muslim emigrated from different countries witnessed racism, stereotyping and Islamophobia at the hands of Spanish in sporadic incidents. They have also experienced discrimination at work places, in public places and have been victims of racial profiling in Barcelona. Despite undergoing mental torture and receiving spiteful racial remarks and intimidation from far-right extremist groups in Barcelona, the Muslim community of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Senegal and Algeria joined hands together to express their solidarity with families of the victims. According to Utrera (2017), the representatives from more than 140 organizations participated in the peace rally. the Muslim immigrants who had protested against the 2017 Barcelona terror attacks included people from different associations such as Pak Federacion de Espana, Federation of Muslim Catalan, representatives of the mosques from Sant Feliu de Llobregat and Sant Vicens del Horts, Dawat-e-Islami, Minhaj-Ul-Quran International, Centre Cultural Islamic Cami de la Pau, La Casa Asia, Stop Als Fenomens Islamofobs (S.A.F.I), Grupo Interreigiose de Raval, Hospitalet espai Interreligios, Bait-ul-Takafa, Movimiento Por La Paz, Islamic Relief, Centro Cultural Islamico Catalan (CCIC), Centro Cultural Islamic Del Carmel, Islamic Centre of Nou Barris, Centre De Culte Sufisme, Islamic Culture Center Al Tauba and Cente Islamic de Barcel and Comision islamica De Espana , Multicultural Muslim Youth, Fundacio Al Fanar and European Institute of the Mediterranean-IEMed (Barcelona Ciutat Refugi, 2017 .

The Muslim protestors who had gathered for protest against the vicious attacks are emanated from different neighbourhoods of Barcelona, such as Santa Coloma de Gramanet, Ciutat Vella, Cerdanyola, Nou Barris, Santi Marti, Sants-Montjuic, Mottet del Valles, Les Corts, Sarria Sant, Ripollet, Sant Gervasi, Horta-Guinardó, S. Vicenc dels Horts, Cornellà del Terri, Badalona, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Arc de Triomf, El Clot, and Sant Andreu de la Barca (Enterria, 2021). Almost two thousand and five hundred (2500) Muslim's protestors condemned the 2017 Barcelona heinous attacks near Plaza Catalunya (Rueckert, 2017). They shared their grief over the loss of victims with their respective families. They delivered a clear message to the world and particularly to those who were behind sabotaging peace in Barcelona by organizing peace marches and rallies to condemn the tragic incidents in Madrid and Barcelona. The analysis has further revealed that fifteen (15) Interviewees out of the total eighteen interviewees were acquainted with a handful of initiatives undertaken by the Barcelona Muslim community with respect to interfaith dialogue. This fact implies two possible meanings; firstly, the initiative undertaken so far didn't get the deserving media coverage and secondly, the initiatives which have been taken so far weren't inclusive enough and thus were unilateral on the part of Muslim community. Interviewee no.3 revealed that an NGO called "*Movimiento Por La Paz*" "*cam de la pau*" "*Islamic Relief*" and "*Dawate Islami*" are active in Madrid and Barcelona and is working on promoting peace.

The Interview no.7 while replying to the question shared that the *City Council* in Barcelona

working on the task of peace building. The respondent also ascertained that the City Council has established a specific Commission called Barcelona International Peace Resource Centre (BIPRC) which is entrusted with the task to build communication with people of different faiths, promote cultural activities and maintain harmony in the society. The Interviewee no.1 disclosed that Muslims community is perceived as terrorists in the aftermath of 2017 Barcelona terror attack. Majority Spaniards believe that those who follow Islam believe in such ideas which harm society. Although, this is not the case in reality and entire community cannot be blamed or punished for the wrongdoing, or an act of terror exacted by an individual or by a particular group. The Interviewee no.2 who is representative of the Sikh community commented that the entire Sikh community was equally as much in grief as the Muslim community after the Barcelona terror attacks. He revealed that it is not right to use one's territory under the pretext of religion for own personal gains. In the case of heinous 2017 Barcelona tragic incident, the attackers had used Islam as a mean to justify the end.

Interview no.13 highlighted that the Christian community in Barcelona have established a centre for interfaith dialogue called "*Nena Cases*" in collaboration with church in Barcelona. The "*Nena Cases*" has also hosted several United Nations (UN) trainings related to peace building. Besides this, Lola Lopez, an Anthropologist by profession and former Chief of religious Affairs is currently serving as Commissioner for Immigration, Interculturality and Diversity has played a pivotal role in organizing a religious event for Muslims on 1st October, 2017, the same day when the Catalan Independence Referendum took place. She liaised between Barcelona City Council and Barcelona Muslims community. A total of two thousand (2000) people had attended the event. Lola Lopez has constituted a working group to safeguard Muslims against discrimination and Islamophobia. In this connection, the government has introduced shock plan and municipal plan to combat discrimination and Islamophobia.

After analyzing the contributions made by Barcelona Muslim community for peace building and interfaith dialogue, it can be argued that the Muslim community has played active role in ensuring peace and initiating interfaith dialogue in Barcelona. Most of the initiatives taken by the Muslim community haven't come to the limelight and that's why majority people aren't cognizant about them. Similarly, besides Muslim community, the Christian community has also made some efforts to initiate interfaith dialogue to reconcile interreligious differences. Despite these efforts and amid the ray of hope for interfaith dialogue, there is trust deficit on each side which is hampering the success of interfaith dialogue. As already mentioned earlier, in the post 9/11 world, the Muslim community in general has been victim of Islamophobia in the west.

Similarly, after the 2004 Madrid and 2017 Barcelona terror attack, the Muslims have become vulnerable to Islamophobia and discrimination. The white Spanish community on the other side due to lack of proper knowledge and understanding of Islam perceives Muslims to be extremists, conservatives and stereotyped against non-Muslims. Both sides have their own apprehensions and reservations against each other. Some elements are deliberately sabotaging the peace building and interfaith dialogue initiatives. The process of interfaith dialogue requires a robust government support. There is a strong need for a comprehensive legislation and deliberative policy making process to ensure that all stakeholders have been involved prior to executing the act or policy.

4.6 Problems faced by Barcelona Muslim Community

The Muslims community in Barcelona is confronted with several problems and challenges. The Barcelona Muslim Community is an amalgamation of different Muslim immigrants from different countries. Islam is the second biggest religion after Christianity in Spain. Since the population of Spain is decreasing with days passing, therefore it needs skilled immigrants from foreign countries for settlement in order to maintain a moderate proportion of population.

In the post 9/11 world, the perception towards Muslims as followers Islam hasn't only changed in the United States but also in the rest of the world and in this connection, Barcelona is no exception. The Muslims have been perceived as conservative, extremists and radicals by the white Spanish in Barcelona. They have been victims of racism, verbal abuse and discrimination in Barcelona. There have been incidents where the Muslims have been victimized through racial profiling. The hatred towards Muslims has been fuelled via xenophobia. After the terror attacks in Spain in general and in Barcelona in particular, the intensity in

Islamophobia against Muslim has been exacerbated. The hatred likewise against Muslims has been also intensified. Though, the racism, prejudice and discrimination isn't that much evident in black and white, however; the number of incidents reported every year pertinent to racism, discrimination, Islamophobia related attacks suggest that the far right nationalist groups in Barcelona are advocating xenophobia and Islamophobia. These groups believe that the Muslims immigrants have taken their jobs and they are resorting to public funds and are a burden on the national exchequer. While in reality, such is not the case. The Muslim immigrants are paying taxes and are running businesses and ultimately are contributing to the national economic pool of the country.

In the aftermath of 2017 Barcelona attack; the Muslims received a severe backlash despite their efforts to promote peace building in Barcelona. Catalan Independent Movement which advocates Catalan nationalism is another substantial threat to Muslims immigrants in Barcelona. Islamophobia is on the verge of increase in Barcelona due to increase in terror attacks worldwide. The Barcelona Muslim community has developed a sense of insecurity amid fierce Islamophobia. Majority respondents when interviewed replied that in more or less cases, they had been victims of racism, verbal abuse and were tortured due to discrimination at workplace. Even in some places, if you a person doesn't speak Catalan, it is hard for him/her to secure a white-collar job in any prestigious organization.

Another severe challenge which is confronted by Muslim community in Barcelona is the cultural adaptability. After living all these years in Barcelona as second, third and fourth generations Muslims, majority Muslims people have issues in adjusting into the Spanish society. There is a huge difference in Spanish and Muslim culture, right from attire, cuisine, religion, language down to rituals, festivals, family system etc. The Muslims immigrants in Barcelona have preserved their family traditions and culture. They still associate themselves with their ancestral roots and their country of origin. This is indeed very frustrating at the same time while living and working in a particular country yet abstaining from adapting to its culture. This contributes clash of civilization and culture. As the famous English saying goes, "*do in Rome as the Romans do*" but unfortunately, it is apparent that the Muslims community doesn't want to do the things in Barcelona as the people of Barcelona do. The Muslims are considered misfit in the Barcelona Muslim society although the Spanish society has tolerated Muslims for centuries in the past and still doing it. The reason being in spite of having multiple and varied stake in Barcelona, they still don't want to adapt to its culture. This gives the far right wings and the nationalists group an opportunity to fan xenophobia, Islamophobia and stereotyping.

Some electronic and print media in the west have tarnished the image of Muslims all over the world. From newspaper to talkshows and popular media, the Muslims are portrayed as terrorists. They are perceived as conservatives, tyrants, oppressors, and violent. They are associated with different terrorist groups. It is worth to mention that terrorists have no religions. All terrorist attacks which have been carried out by terrorists across the world aren't carried out by Muslims at all. However, this doesn't give anybody the right to associate a particular community with a stereotyped label. The Muslims are left with very limited choice to prove themselves as peace loving people. It is a very wrong and undue perception against Muslims which is held by non-Muslims in the world. There had been no incident of Islamophobia before 2017 Barcelona attack but immediately after this attack, the perception of non- Muslims against Muslims have been changed. Muslims places of worships have been targeted. In some places, graffiti art has been performed on the walls and front doors of the mosques. Muslims have been also threatened physically on street, intimidated through verbal abuse and are threatened on social media as well. False information is propagated against Muslims under pre-meditated plans and directed to tarnish the image of Muslims all over the world.

The Spaniards majority in Barcelona believe that Muslims are oppressors as they oppress their women. They think that Muslims enforce their women to wear hijab whereas they are totally naïve about the teachings of Islam. They have no idea about the fundamental tenets of Islam. It is not the wish of the Islamic men to ask women to wear hijab or cover their bodies rather it is the direct commandment of God revealed in Quran. The Spaniards have several other misperceptions against Muslims such as they think that holding fast during the month of Ramadan is totally inhuman. Again, hold fast during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. In addition to spiritual virtue of holding fast, it has numerous health benefits which have been endorsed by the medical science in its recent studies. This wrong misperception has contributed to stereotyping, prejudice, hatred, xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism against Muslims.

4.7 Challenges to Peace building and Interfaith dialogue in Barcelona

Interfaith dialogue and the peace building goal associated with it are difficult tasks to achieve simultaneously. Interfaith dialogue and peace building are correlated with each other. The ultimate aim of interfaith dialogue is to achieve peace through pacific means by addressing mutual disputes, conflicts of religious nature and promoting tolerance through reconciliation. Barcelona is culturally, religiously and ethnically a diverse society. Immigrants from different social, economic, political and cultural backgrounds have been settled in its different nooks and corners. Over the years, these immigrants have become the part and parcel of Barcelona. They serving in different walks of life and contributing to the development of Barcelona. Muslims are the largest minority in Barcelona and therefore they have established their own identity. The Muslims have been living in Barcelona with non-Muslims peacefully all these years.

Another major challenge posed to interfaith dialogue is group of people associated with Catalan Independence Movement. They are against interfaith dialogue as they promote Catalan nationalism and xenophobia. They have developed hatred against foreigners all these years. The Muslim, Christians, and Sikh communities are trying humble efforts to initiate dialogue at lower level yet its magnitude and scope is not extensive enough to attract people in bulk.

Extremists, radicals and religious fanatics groups are another major obstacle in the way of initiating interfaith dialogue. They are conservative people and are not open to dialogue. The Muslim community itself is divided into different sect and each sect has its own belief. Integrating these Muslims representing different sects is another difficult task. However, it is an understood fact that when it comes to peace and nation building, people put their personal grudges and differences aside and consider national interest above everything. Bringing together people of diverse religious belief having distinct backgrounds for interfaith dialogue on the table is a challenging task. Historical religious disputes among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs are also an obstruction to the commencement of interfaith dialogue. The Muslim community still hasn't absorbed into the culture of Barcelona. The Muslim community is also least open to adapt into the foreign culture. The history has been also spoiled by biased writers who have portrayed Muslims as invaders, looters and tyrants. This has brainwashed the minds of people in a certain direction.

Until now, the Muslims community doesn't have a proper mosque to pray. People have constructed prayer halls and rooms to offer prayer; however, the city of Barcelona doesn't have a grand mosque. The government is willing to construct the mosque but there is certain resistance from the Catalan nationalists. Also, due to division of sects among Muslims, the government cannot actually decide to construct a mosque for a specific Muslim sect as Sunni don't pray in Shia Muslim mosque and vice versa. Similarly, Sunni people also don't pray in Ahmadiya's place of worship. This has also become a challenge for the government since the situation is in a fix. Moreover, this has also contributed a sense of ill-will and discontentment among Muslim community against Catalan nationalists and the government since they have withheld the decision to construct a grand mosque for Muslims in Barcelona. It is a test ground for the government to reconcile the dissident parties and address their apprehensions and take the relevant stakeholders into confidence prior taking a rational decision.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to pinpoint that the present study is focused on highlighting the role of interfaith dialogue in peace building in Barcelona. It is concentrated on pinpointing the role of Muslim community of Barcelona in fostering peace through interfaith dialogue. Future studies can attempt to explore the role of Muslim community in peace building in Spain or such studies may draw a comparison between the role of Muslim community in Madrid and Barcelona or any other areas or regions where the Muslims are in majority. Future researcher may consider exploring the role of non-Muslim community in peace building through interfaith dialogue in Barcelona.

Further studies can be conducted to draw comparison among the role of Muslim communities in different European countries. Studies may be conducted to investigate the political participation of Barcelona Muslim community in elections. Moreover, there is a dire need to conduct a study to examine the political rights of minorities in Barcelona and the need for creating reserved seats for religious minorities in Catalan parliament. Future researcher can also consider conducting a study on Islamophobia faced by the Moroccan Muslims community living in Barcelona. In addition to this, separate studies can be conducted to highlight the role of Moroccan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and other Muslim community in peace building in Barcelona. Besides this, other research work worthy of exploring include the cultural adaptability issues of Barcelona

Muslim community, immigration problems, growing intensity of extremism among Arab Spanish (Moroccan) Muslim community, insecurity and security challenges of Barcelona Muslims community and the need for enlighten moderation among the Muslim community in Barcelona etc.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been proposed for peace building and interfaith dialogue in Barcelona:

A society with shattered goals and different interests cannot form social cohesion and therefore cannot create favorable environment for peace. In the case of Barcelona, the Muslims and non-Muslims community needs common platform such as interfaith dialogue where all stakeholders can share, mediate, express and reconcile their mutual difference and propose a viable solution for mutual coexistence and building sustainable peace. The Barcelona City Council and the government of Catalonia should extend representation to all minorities group in policy making process. However, the Muslims being the largest minority in Barcelona should be taken on board as potential stakeholder, they should be engaged in the legislation and policy making process pertinent to the domain of peace and interfaith dialogue. This will disseminate the message of inclusiveness to the minorities living in Barcelona region.

The government should introduce new curriculum on tolerance, peace and interfaith harmony at primary and secondary levels in schools at county and national level. Academicians, scholars, researchers, religious leaders, journalists, members from civil society, lawyers, members of advocacy group, policy makers and representatives of minority groups. This will ascertain the provisions for unbiased and impartial literature promoting religious harmony, tolerance, extending respect for other faiths and developing a culture for peace, and building of a plural society where people of diverse ethnic, religious, social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds can coexist peacefully without any hard or hostile feelings for a particular community. The government in collaboration with IGOs such as UNESCO should finance projects which are aimed at peace building and interfaith dialogue. The Barcelona Muslim community needs to adapt itself to the Spanish culture. Despite living in Spain for several decades, the Muslims are still not open to Spanish culture. They are labeled conservative in the context that they don't make efforts to learn Spanish or Catalan language. They adhere themselves to their traditions and believe in the status quo. For this very reason, the Muslims are labeled as conservative and considered pessimists in the progressive society of Barcelona. They should participate in Spanish cultural events and reciprocally, they should invite non- Muslims to Islamic events in order to extend a gesture of good will.

The Muslim community along with other minority groups should open the doors of their respective places to general public and let others experience and see religious rituals performed by Muslims and to address misperceptions and stereotyping. The government should monitor the activities of all places of worship regardless of a specific religion and particularly those places where an Imam, Priest, Rabi, Guru, Hindu Pandit or Monk for that matter is involved in promoting violence, hate speech, extremism and terrorism should be brought to justice by the law enforcement agencies. There should be a zero-tolerance policy in place for people who promote hate speech, false propaganda against a particular community. As part of promoting intercultural activities, the minorities should organize an "OPEN DAY" every week to invite people of different faiths to their places of worship. For instance, OPEN MOSQUE DAY, OPEN SYNAGOGUE DAY, OPEN CHURCH DAY, OPEN TEMPLE DAY, OPEN GURDWARA DAY etc., should be celebrated to let people develop an understanding about different religions and its followers.

Moreover, the government should launch a program to impart trainings to religious leaders such as Imam, Rabi, Priest, Rabi, Guru, Monk etc., and equip them with the basic skills and knowledge of spreading the message of peace and humanity. In fact, a government approved training course should be provided and made available to representatives of different faiths. In short, the local government of Barcelona can

cooperate with Imams to deliver their religious talks in Spanish or Catalan language so that people can understand what they preach inside mosques in Barcelona.

The findings have unfolded that the media is considered the fourth pillar of state in the modern world. Media is a very powerful tool which can play an instrumental role in elevating the distorted image of Muslims. Both electronic and print media can contribute a positive role in restoring the credibility of Muslims by highlighting the contributions and efforts rendered by Muslim community for peace building and interfaith dialogue in Barcelona. The Muslim community in collaboration with National media, Radio and social media groups can organize a talk show and invite representatives of different faiths, political parties, far right groups etc., to project the real image of Islam and Muslims and demystify all doubts, misperceptions, and misinformation which non-Muslims have formed about Muslims in their minds.

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