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# From Acceptance to Contribution: The Role of ICNA in the Integration of Transnational Immigrants in Canada

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**ABSTRACT** Ethnic and religious organizations are usually criticized for being disconnected from the mainstream. The present research offers a counter-narrative through empirical evidence of the contribution made by Canadian Muslim organization. A case study was employed to explore the role of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) in Muslim immigrants' integration into Canadian society. Data were obtained through interviews with current and previous presidents and the management of these organizations. Other forms of data were collected from the official websites of ICNA, its brochures and annual reports. Findings revealed that ICNA has successfully facilitated new transnational Muslims and Canadian community at large through its volunteering and holistic services to meet the needs and resultantly to build inter and intragroup ties and integration into Canadian society. Findings guide towards using community organizations as a tool to promote socio-cultural, economic and political integration for a well-connected and harmonious society.

**INDEX TERMS** Canadian society, economic integration, political integration, socio-cultural integration, transnational Muslim community.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Canada has been the most welcoming country that has been welcoming immigrants and Muslims to settle and be a part of society [1]. For this purpose, the government of Canada has been developing new policies to support Muslim Immigrants while opposing negative attitudes towards immigration. According to [2], the immigration of Muslims in Canadian society has been the most debatable topics for academics and practitioners to reveal the acceptance and contribution levels of Muslims in Canadian society. The study of [3] has identified that Canadian society has been vast numbers of acceptance levels for immigrants, which can be seen in terms of different surveys and polls. Public polls reveal that society accepts new immigrants and want their levels to increase. However, this is not the case of other developed, or developing countries as their attitudes towards immigrants and immigrant communities are in opposite nature. Although the existing studies have been focusing on the acceptance levels of transnational Muslim immigrants in Canada, their contributions to Canadian society are still debatable and requires detailed analysis. Many Islamic organizations in Canada have

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been working forward to introduce new policies where Muslim immigrants are encouraged to be a part of the society and contribute equally to that of any other Canadian citizen. ICNA has been one of the most recognized organizations that have been working towards the goals of fostering cultural and social integration of the Muslim community with Canadian society. Thus, the current study wishes to explore the role of ICNA in integrating transnational Muslim immigrant's community with Canadian society while discussing its journey from acceptance to contributions in the society.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section covers the detailed literature review of existing studies. To analyse the research aim and objectives, this section identified the main political factors socio-cultural influencing the integration of Muslims in Canadian society. Moreover, this section also entails the role of organizations for integration of transnational integration of Muslims while identifying the significance of the study and research gap.

### A. IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION

Integration is a two-way process [4] that involves the successful efforts from both sides: immigrants and the local community. Entzinger and Biezeveld [4] pointed out four

dimensions of integration, which are as follows: socio-economic domain, cultural domain, legal and political domain, and the attitude of recipient societies towards migrants. Here, it is to be noted that the last dimension plays its role in all three aspects mentioned above. Hence, the integration of the Muslim community in Canadian society can be discussed in the discourse of political, social and economic discussion. Litchmore and Safdar [6] articulated that the social, political and economic integration of Muslims in Western society has been a debatable topic where its impact on identities and friendship patterns are necessary to be evaluated. The integration of transnational Muslims with the political practices can be related to either engaging in anti-Muslim counteractions or with the main focus on transforming their socio-cultural patterns to become a part of the Canadian society [7]. However, there have been different viewpoints for the political integration of Muslims in western societies where it has been explored that the social and political dynamics and struggle against the stigma are more common within Muslim communities and their acceptance in the society [8]. But, it is also explored that when Muslims are integrated politically, they can produce closer relations with the political processes while producing greater integration with society.

Active citizenship is defined by [41] as “*participation in civil society, community and political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and by human rights and democracy*”. The concepts of political integration of Muslim immigrants in society have been reviewed by most of the Canadian political parties. The study of [9] has identified that most of the leading Canadian political parties are now wishing to be seen as pro-immigrant parties while promoting the concepts of multiculturalism and equal employment opportunities. However, the Canada-based Reform Party was identified to be the socially conservative party; against the immigration policies and interventions [10].

As far as acceptance and contribution of Muslim immigrants are concerned, studies reveal that the majority of the Canadians follow the belief that Muslims in Canada are striving to have a distinct identity within the community [10]. However, on the other hand, most of the Muslims feel that they want to integrate with the community as per their co-religionists beliefs. More than one-third of the Canadians believe that the Muslims believe and focus on integrating with Canadian cultures, norms and values to be an active part of the society [10]. As per the reports, it has been notified that the Muslim-Canadians and Canadians, in general, believe that there are bonding relations with each other. However, most Canadians agree that having a separate identity of Muslims in Canada is not a positive sign for Canadian society [2], [3]. Moreover, it has also been identified that the incidence of active employment of technically selective immigrants is that immigration has a positive impact on the social and economic perspectives of the country while the social expenses and costs are taken into consideration to establish a stable welfare state. Immigrant children from India, China and dif-

ferent Asian countries have succeeded in attaining higher education [11].

### B. ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS

Since 9/11, many Western societies have been fearing Muslims and have been considering as the social threat for their economies [12]. Many orientalist admit that Islam and Muslims do not have any relation to terrorism. On the other hand, few orientalist show wrong perceptions of the world about the Islam and its teaching and beliefs; “The Crises of Islam” by Lewis [13], who was not only a writer but also an advisor to US government, is one of the examples. Followed by this threat, most of the western societies have been criticizing Muslims and their religious and cultural values while immigrant Muslims in Western societies are the major subjects of these criticisms. As [14] record these widespread insinuations in the British context: “*Islam is perceived as a source of cultural threat... and mosques, in particular, are perceived as sites where the difference is fostered*”. This view has been considered as one of the main reasons why Islamic organizations have been working towards the integration of Muslims with western societies [15]. It is hypothesised that attachment with communities leaves minorities with little gain. However, research showed that through ties with community groups, minorities gain solidarity that enables their greater involvement in society and maintain their active citizenship. Hence, organizations become ‘a site of cultural continuity and stability, which ultimately contributes to their social integration’ [16]. The main reason behind the establishment of these organizations is to maintain Muslim identity in the society, protect their cultures and to clarify that Islam or Muslims are no threat to their communities or their cultures. The study of [10] identifies that organizations have been thriving to encourage Muslims and Canadians to live in harmony and peace while accepting cultural and religious differences. This intimated that the central role of these organizations is to maintain the cultural, social and political integrity within transnational Muslims.

According to the literature, it has been found out that the because of differences and criticisms faced by Muslims in western societies, various Islamic organizations have been formed in order to fight against these negative perceptions against Muslims and to maintain harmony and be a part of the community [11]. Hence, these organizations play a role of an advocate while striving for the freedom and justice of Muslim communities, even being the minority. Moreover, [10] also explored that social relations can be described as bridging and bonding relations where societies are the collection of diverse and culturally-distinct ethnic groups. However, in order to foster good ethnic and social relationships, these organizations have been playing the role of a bridging medium to strengthen the ethnocultural boundaries of people [17]. The organizations can either be social groups and communities, religious centres and school committees in order to resolve issues such as cultural issues, ethnic and religious issues etc. via civic engagement.

Muslims are supposed to live their lives according to the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law). It has been notified that the Islamic law refers to the responsibilities and rights of individuals represented as an intricate ethical-legal system [18], [19]. More importantly, these are the norms developed according to Quranic examples and values that are necessary to be followed by Muslims all across the world [18]. The Islamic organizations are established in western communities for the protection of ethnic, cultural and social values of Muslims. Reitz *et al.* [9] argued that immigrants find it difficult to follow Islamic jurisprudence and incorporate Islam into their lives. This is because of the external pressures and environment of the communities that are traditionally focusing on Christianity. Moreover, there has been a constant strain amongst the transnational Muslims against gender roles. Therefore, these organizations have been focusing on helping Muslims to follow Islamic jurisprudence and lead their lives in peace and integrity while living in Western communities. Similarly, the purpose behind these organizations is to make clear distinctions between gender roles, values and cultural and ethnic perspectives of Muslims while residing in western societies [7].

Throughout the debates related to socio-cultural, economic and political integration of Muslims, scholars and researchers have focused on exploring the role of these organizations that are considered as the agents to foster mobilization and integration between culturally diverse societies and communities [3], [6], [11]. It has been identified from the study of Karim [8] that minority communities in Western societies are considered to be less active or criticised amongst the locals, however, the inclusion of these organizations are in support of ethnic identities and religious beliefs of the minority groups [20]. Therefore, it is necessary that these organizations are explored as per their roles and contributions to protect the identities of Muslims and their social, cultural and economic values in western societies. Research in the USA showed a significant relationship between Muslims' link with mosques and politics. In a survey of [21], Muslims' religious activities and volunteering were positively associated with their political participation. Bagby [22] observed mosque leaders in the USA, encouraging their community to become a part of the US political system. Later Read's [23] study also supported this view that Muslims with Arab background were actively involved in mosques and non-Muslim civil society engagements. Some European studies also supported the perspective. McAndrew and Voas [24] found that British Muslims with higher involvement in religious practices were more likely to be active in mainstream civic activities and participate in politics. In another study in the Netherlands, the participation in religious community organizations of Turkish and Moroccan Muslims was found positively correlated with their trust in political activities [25]. Recent evidence from Australia and Germany was presented by [11] after their interviews with members of community organizations. The study confirmed that community act as a site of active citizenship and lead people from the community to intercommunity work.

One of the most integral organizations that focus on the cultural and social integrity of Muslims in Canada is ICNA whose vision is to build an exemplary Canadian Muslim community. ICNA has been focusing on the rights and responsibilities of the immigrant Muslims in order to trail towards the path guided by Islamic law while keeping in mind the economic and social development of Canada as well. Akbar [26] explained that ICNA had been continuously working on changing the perceptions and attitudes of Muslims and Canadian citizens in order to propagate the Islamic way of leading lives. The main role of this organization has been debatable as to reveal how the organization has been transforming the Muslim community and to integrate transnational Muslims with Canadian norms while following the Islamic jurisprudence as well. ICNA was established in 1970 where the organization since its beginning has been focusing on the promotion and encouragement of transnational Muslims to integrate with the Canadian norms and customs [27]. It is necessary to analyse the role of organizations to preserve the rights and religious beliefs of people living in Canada because Muslims residing in Western countries are being criticised over their cultural values and religious beliefs.

The classical and theoretical accounts of existing studies have revealed that the integration of Muslim communities with the societies are fundamental by setting the stage for extensive research. Muslim community organizations' role in fostering social, economic or political participation is an under-researched area [11], particularly outside the USA. Few studies mentioned above refer to the possibility of using organizations as a site of political and social integration. Studies on identifying the role of organizations, especially ICNA, has not been explored yet which provides a theoretical reason for the conduction of this research. Although the integration of different cultures and ethnic groups have been considered most crucial topics in the literature, this sensitive topic needs to be explored as per the new evidence and statistics while keeping the main focus on ICNA. As per Article 1 of ICNA's Charter and By-Laws, which deals with the Membership, any Canadian citizen can work with ICNA regardless of gender, colour, race and ethnicity. Similarly, Article 13 states that for efficient supervision, the organization shall be divided into varied regions of Canada [28].

Generally, there is a little doubt that the organizations dedicated for minority communities are considered as important agents for new immigrants who are offering linguistically and culturally unfamiliar environment while keeping their focus towards solidarity and psychological and cultural support [11]. This debate has been more controversial in order to reveal how these organizations have been transforming and playing their roles beyond the phase of settlement [11], [15]. It was further argued that these minorities are gaining little or no continuous attachment when engaged in minority communities, thus this research is significant as it attempts to explore the role of organizations towards promoting acceptance and contribution of Muslim minorities in Canadian societies. The present study focuses on the problem of whether ICNA plays a role in immigrants' social,

**TABLE 1. Profile of participants.**

Respondents	Duration of immigration	Role/ Responsibilities	Country of Origin
A	19	Senior Director, Admin. & coordination	India
I	20	Member, Board Of Directors	Bangladesh
K	21	Vice President	India
W	26	President Of Dawa Department	Bangladesh
M	24	Member, Board Of Directors	Pakistan
T	19	President	Pakistan

political and economic integration in Canadian society and in making attitudes of recipient societies favourable towards new immigrants. This study seeks the answer through the following question:

What is the role of ICNA in transnational Muslims integration in Canada?

### III. METHODS

Guided by the aim and research question, a qualitative research approach was chosen for the present study as it examines people's experiences in a natural setting, to understand the meaning people attach to a social or human issue [29]. Here, the researchers undertook a constructivist's ontology that reality would be conceived in multiple ways. Likewise, the researchers held the epistemological stance that they were not a neutral observer and would co-create the reality along with participants. A case study as a strategy of inquiry was adopted and was triangulated with interviews and document/web analysis. In the present study, Canada was selected due to its distinctive experience of immigrant and multicultural society [20].

#### A. PARTICIPANTS

A sample of 6 participants was selected who served ICNA as main head or organizer/managers. Heads and main organizers were selected as they might have a full picture of an organization's total performance. Another source of data was the organizations' official website and the documents provided by its offices. Researchers also attended events of these organizations held during June 2018-February 2019 and recorded the civic engagement. This triangulation made it possible for researchers to interpret and contextualise the findings and understand the organizations' life.

Among the selected 6 participants, two were from India, two were from Bangladesh, and two were from Pakistan as illustrated in Table 1. Except one, others came to Canada in their early 40s, and they have been in Canada for last 20-26 years.

#### B. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through semi-structured as it gives little flexibility along with little structure. All interviews were one-

to-one conducted at a convenient time for the respondents. Each interview took 15-20 minutes. Review of literature highlighted themes related to integration. As researchers were interested in including major themes of integration from immigrants as well as from native of Canada, interview questions were formed around the activities of the organization regarding economic, political, socio-cultural integration and organization's role in bringing the natives closer to transnational Muslims as shown in Appendix 1. The interview data were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Documents in the form of brochures, pamphlets were collected from head offices. Organizations' websites were accessed to gather data. During different events organized by these organizations, data were recorded in the form of field notes. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study and their right to leave their voluntary participation if they want. A consent form was signed by all of the participants, as shown in Appendix 2. Their names were replaced with pseudonyms to secure their identity. The data were sent back to the participant to verify the truthfulness of transcriptions in order to achieve credibility and objectivity.

#### C. METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from interviews, documents, websites and observations were coded following Gibbs' suggestion of data-driven coding. Though literature informed about the major themes, yet coding was kept open without pre-determined categories to ensure that the resulting themes should correspond to reality.

### IV. FINDINGS

ICNA is an International non-governmental non-profitable charitable Organisation established in 1970, committed to building an exemplary Canadian Muslim society. It is working in different provinces and cities in the form of chapters. Themes emerged from Participants' views, and examination of annual reports and websites highlighted an emphasis on contribution and not just integration. According to the participant, ICNA has successfully contributed through its efforts for socio-cultural, political and economic integration of transnational Muslims into Canadian society.

#### A. SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION

According to participants, their organization promote social and cultural integration through a number of ways. Connecting Muslim immigrants from all over the world are the major step. ICNA also fosters integration through not only maintaining immigrants' Muslim identity but also developing respect among them for Canadian norms. Another way of doing so is enhancing new immigrants' language skills.

##### 1) MAINTAINING MUSLIM IDENTITY

Maintenance of Muslim identity is actualized in a number of ways. First, ICNA provides opportunities to carry their values and traditions by offering various programmes.



ICNA promote different programs around the year based on Muslim and Islamic culture in order to preserve their cultural identity. Eid programs, conferences, conventions and other programs are being arranged for this purpose. (T)

It also educates them to maintain their character. As “young children and new families are more at risk. Therefore we provide Islamic educational guidance to them to play a positive role in Canadian Society”, Respondent T further explained. Each unit or sometimes multiple units combined, arrange ‘Welcome Ramadan’ programs followed by a Dora e Quran (a scheduled period in which a brief but wholesome explanation of the complete Quran is provided). Lectures are delivered about the virtues of Ramadan for spiritual learning to prepare themselves for the blessed month. A soul-uplifting and the faith-refreshing experience is done through fasting, charities, recitation and listening of Quran in Taraweeh, Qiyyam ul Lail to purify hearts and intentions.

Second, ICNA offers programmes which provide counselling to immigrants within their value system to make their transition in a new place all the more positive. ICNA Relief Canada’s (IRC) Muslim family services department strives to resolve conflicts to strengthen family bonding and to preserve the values of Canadian Muslim families. As T said, A lot of immigrant families, after moving to Canada go through financial hardship, social issues and cultural shock which affects their family life. To resolve a family dispute, ICNA has started family counselling programme which helps to maintain their family relationship and to avoid separation.

These programmes also focus parent-children issues to help “in resolving problems between immigrant parents and their children raised/born and raised in this society and how to preserve the identity as a Muslim, also cover the social issues being faced by immigrants within our programmes.” (T said). ICNA also offers matrimonial programmes for Muslim youth as T shared, “Apart from this, to keep their cultural and family values intact we have a matrimonial programme which helps the younger generation to find their match to keep their values and cultural identity to next generation”. ICNA established Muslim Family Services (MFS) in 2005 with the aim of meeting the social services, training and health needs of Great Toronto Area Muslim families. The mandate of MFS includes also teaching; psycho-social analysis; and developing clients’ emotional, spiritual and self-management skills. Annual reports show that IRC counselled 803 families and couples for their psychological and emotional well-being in a period of 2014-2018. IRC arranges events to promote family values and social justice. In one of these events, IRC received a certificate of appreciation from Bonnie Crombie, Mayor of Mississauga.

## 2) DEVELOPING RESPECT FOR CANADIAN NORMS

All participants were proud of being a Canadian citizen, and they emphasised it as their first identity. The data revealed strong feelings towards the country as respondent A said,

“We always promote that you are Canadian first and then your home country comes second that is the concept which all the Muslim organizations are promoting about the community”. As an organization, ICNA creates awareness among new immigrants about Canadian norms. In mosques, new immigrants are encouraged to follow the rules and regulations of the country. ICNA arranges different cultural and social events to facilitate newcomers to learn about Canadian culture and to share their own culture with other communities.

“Cultural identity is something that cannot be taken away from anybody. Identity evolves from adapting to new environments throughout life. One of the important responsibilities of ICNA is to educate people regarding cultural and religious practice. We used to have a different kind of workshops to guide the immigrants and ethnic as per Muslim communities with do’s and don’ts Canadian norms. We also provide ethnic guidance to individuals to avoid and prohibit them from activities that are not acceptable in Islam and Canada being a Muslim such as drugs.” (T)

According to M, immigrants from different geographical and cultural areas of the world come with different background knowledge, and they need to understand Canadian systems. He quoted an example of the Police department, unlike Asian cultures,

“the police system here is very different... Hence, a police officer here is considered as your friend and a partner. So, we try to inculcate these concepts and beliefs within our people. We show people that police officers here are for their protection, we engage people with them by inviting them to mosques and different event to mingle with each other.”

## 3) NETWORKING

Respondents were of the view that one of the major contributions of ICNA was the provision of referral services which connect new immigrants to other community resources, counselling services. Through these services, immigrants are better able to access and navigate Canada’s education, health, and other social systems. As A said,

“Our organisation has developed a very close relationship with all government agencies and organisations. We educate the people and invite them to our culture and make them interact with our community and we go through the rituals we have a family day programme on the 17th and 18th of February we are conducting a program for last 6 to 7 years we invite all the communities on the family day.”

## 4) DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS

As transnational Muslims hail from the different geographical and linguistic background, access to multi-lingual services is important. ICNA encourages language learning to enhance newcomers’ social and economic capacity. T said,

“We don’t have any language class for Muslims or communities, but we encourage them to use ESL classes to enhance their English language skills. In spite of their ethnic background, ICNA organizes and conduct their cultural, social, and religious programs in English to enhance the language skills”.

A said, “We know settlement agencies who do their services in terms of enhancing language courses so normally whenever our new immigrants come ...we are referring them to the settlement agencies who are conducting such programmes.” Respondents were well aware of the need of language skills for new immigrants and believed that ‘to be Canadian, you must speak official language ...love and respect country ...know the history’. However, as the government of Canada is taking care of the linguistic needs of immigrants and language learning programmes are free of cost, ICNA acts as a bridge between new immigrant and these programmes.

5) YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Youth Leadership and Development Program (YLDP) is designed to impart practical skills needed to become self-fulfilled, dynamic and results-oriented youth leaders. Respondent W said, “We have special programs for our youth as well to educate them. ICNA also focus on youth leadership development programme to build the leadership skills within youth.” Annual reports from 2013-2017 showed that 644 youth received various skill-trainings as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. IRC annual report on YLDP.

Year	High School & University Students
2013	160
2014	125
2015	100
2016	80
2017	100+

These findings on sociocultural integration showed that participants of the present study as members of ICNA hold positive views about their Canadian status and exert efforts to strengthen their ties. These findings also deny earlier assumptions about the role of mosques as sites promoting cultural segregation [30]. ICNA uses all sites to make Muslims integrated into Canadian society and offer orientation in a culturally and linguistically unfamiliar environment. It helps not only in maintaining the culture and provides solidarity but also assist in coping with the settlement crisis in a new place [11].

**B. POLITICAL INTEGRATION**

While the debates on immigrant integration are mainly concerned with the socio-economic aspect, the role of organizations as the agents of political integration should also be emphasised. Political integration refers to active citizenship and performative membership of a society. Adler and Goggin’s [31] conceptualization of political integration includes both formal and informal civic actions, “between involvement in community activities ...and involvement in political activities” (240). Hence, for the present study, it was operationalized into involvement in politics and civic engagement. Bloemraad [32] asserts that grouping may be a prerequisite for political incorporation” (328) and “to ignore the ethnic community blinds us to a key mechanism facilitating immigrants’ incorporation into

the political system”, (323). An organization may serve as the ‘training ground for entry into the wider society, building civic skills and encouraging active civic involvement’ [16].

1) INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

ICNA is a charitable organization, and members cannot directly get involved in political campaigns. All participants were of the view that they do not endorse any particular candidate or any particular political party. However, ICNA plays a productive role and tries to create awareness about the Canadian political system and the importance of being involved in the political process and exercising the right to vote. As T said,

*We do have programs where we encourage people, but the immigrants need to learn the Canadian political system. When we bring these communities together, we try to educate them, and we have been successful in creating the awareness of voting amongst the Muslim community in the last ten years.*

ICNA motivates people to “participate in voting so that their voice can be listened in the parliament” (I). The result is that “We have seen our communities be very engaged with the political system (A).” This stance was further supported by M, who started taking part in elections. In this way, ethnic and community organizations, despite their non-involvement in politics, provide an entry point for political engagement.

2) CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

ICNA was reported to be successfully active in promoting citizenship through not only its intra-community civic activities but also inter-community civic engagements. All ICNA members are encouraged to be involved in some capacity in Muslim community based civic participation to bring all communities of Canada closer. Celebrating each other’s festivals serves as a token of belonging and closeness. As T shared, “Recently at the Christmas Day, we organised Christmas dinner for other communities to maintain integration.”

Most of its activities as volunteering in schools or community centres, shovelling snow on streets and cleaning parks, tree planting, blood donations, food drives for needy and homeless are open for all Canadians, no matter which community they belong to. This is the key finding of this research in the context of political integration. Volunteering is a major community-building vehicle for organizations. ICNA involves other communities also to participate in their services, as T said,

*We are also active in social participation where we take garbage regularly from the streets. There are many other activities as well where we also engage different people from different age group by inviting them to our mosques, churches, temples etc. This creates an integration within society.*

Through volunteering and relief work, opportunities for people are created to connect with others by contributing to the community as a whole. ICNA Relief Canada (IRC) established ten resource centers which are located in Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton-Brantford, Milton, Mississauga, Montreal, Ottawa, Scarborough, Surrey, and Thorncliffe. These Resource Centers organized many workshops and

awareness programs such as positive parenting, healthy family relationships, women’s wellness program, health & nutrition seminars, computer classes, sewing and English language classes, career coaching to empower clients & reduce poverty. From 2013-2015, about 1, 31, 000 individuals were served (annual report, 2015). A total domestic disbursement in 2016 and 2017 was recorded as \$2, 247, 246 and \$2, 288, 506 respectively (annual reports 2016, 2017). A document analysis of annual reports highlighted the following major civic activities.

Shelter houses named ‘Maryam Homes’ are built under IRC in Mississauga to create a space for women fleeing abusive relationships and looking for a safe living environment. IRC purchased a property for the purpose in 2015 at the cost of \$777,000 (annual report 2014). Women are provided with food, culturally compatible counselling and spiritual wellness services by qualified caregivers so that they could get back to a normal, dignified life.

Hunger is a widespread issue in all over the world. Even in our comparatively affluent Canadian society, the high cost of foods, and decreased access to traditional foods has increased food insecurity. ICNA Relief Food Bank is a community-run initiative first launched in Mississauga in 2005. Scarborough, Calgary and Edmonton, Milton and Vancouver Food Banks are opened up within the last 3 years. These food banks are the last resort for poverty-stricken people without boundaries. As T mentioned, “We had 600 food packages to be delivered that day to different people of communities other than Muslims. So, we were celebrating with our Christian friend to show that Muslim communities are there to help and support them.” An analysis of annual performance reports showed that ICNA contributes significantly to relieve hunger in Canada as table 3 shows. It also supports awareness-raising campaigns that increase community participation to find long-term solutions.

**TABLE 3. IRC annual report on food banks.**

Year	No. of the person (families)	Amount spent
2018	53000	2 million \$
2017	57000 (14000)	2 million \$
2016	53000 (13500)	2 million \$

Foster parenting is a model whereby trained foster parents provide temporary care to children in a safe, nurturing, and healthy family environments during the times when their own families are unable to do so. There is a huge shortage of Muslim foster parents in comparison with the number of Muslim children requiring foster care (annual report, 2013). Therefore, as A said, “we conduct workshops and elaborates about foster parenting so those people who are interested we gather them through the mainstream system to become foster parents, so we have a foster parenting programme you know for the immigrants”. The role of IRC’s foster parenting initiative is to link interested families with their local Children’s Aid Society (CAS). IRC also raises awareness on how to become a foster parent within the Muslim community through seminars, workshops, & Khutba’s presentations.

Some of these seminars were held in 2017 and 2018 in collaboration with Peel Children’s Aid Society.

An analysis of documents also showed IRC’s contribution to senior citizens. Life challenges due to ageing may lead to depression, and lack of human attention or healthy socialization may worsen the adverse conditions of the elderly. IRC launched a seniors’ networking group in 2013 which engages them in a culturally inclusive environment to allow them to feel culturally and socially connected. Senior support programmes are held at all IRC resource centres to provide senior citizens with a forum where they can share their issues, develop skills, socialize and volunteer their services. Events of social networking including picnic, outdoor excursions, games, health seminars exercise and information lessons are held. In 2017 IRC was granted another project by the ministry called ‘Senior skilled connect’. Workshops conducted under the project were each of 3-hour duration, and light exercises and yoga sessions were the part of each workshop. From 2017 till now, 25 workshops are held on using computers, elders abuse awareness, healthy living and self-awareness, benefitting 288 seniors. The detail is presented in the appendix.

Besides other activities, ICNA has pledged to support initiatives by local communities to help Canadian Hospitals and started campaigns to raise funds for local hospitals and mosques. The idea of fundraising for Credit Valley Hospital was initiated by ICNA in 2012. Other two projects include Scarborough General and Brantford General. However, it attracted the attention of the whole Muslim community for better results. In the early months of 2019, it arranged a Family Day Walkathon where 500,000 \$ was set a target, and half the target was achieved.

Another area where ICNA’s services are commendable is funeral support for the deceased’s family. The cost of the most modest funeral arrangements for a departed soul may often reach beyond the capacity and may cause the grieving family to turn to others for financial aid. Funeral Support Fund of IRC served 22 families from 2014 to 2018.

IRC also provided Emergency relief services for all Canadians. In 2016, IRC provided relief services after different accidents including Fort McMurray Wildfire in which IRC helped 2000 people with \$50,000. In another tragic explosion in Mississauga neighbourhood, IRC provided emergency relief, food, and monetary support to the victims (annual report, 2016). In 2017, after Quebec Mosque tragic, IRC honoured the late professor Dr, Khaled Belkacemi by awarding scholarship which was presented by his wife, Dr Safia Hamoudi, to three PhD students of the faculty of Agriculture (p.28 annual report 2017).

Canada has responded to the complex humanitarian emergency in Syria. Annual reports of ICNA revealed that after Justin Trudeau’s call for Syrian refugees’ help in 2015, IRC sponsored 65 Syrian refugee families out of a target of 100 to settle in different cities of Canada. Each family was provided with financial support for one year. Recently, ICNA sponsored 11 Rohingya refugee families in collaboration with



**TABLE 4.** IRC annual report on zakat distribution.

Year	Zakat (Religious Alms) distributed	No. of Families benefitted
2018	100,000\$	75
2017	55000\$	57
2016	41000\$	43
2015	38850\$	50
2014	48000\$	54

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada to settle them in Kitchener, Canada.

**C. ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**

**1) PROVIDING RELIEF TO THE NEEDY**

Another hard task for immigrant integration in any society is enabling them moving up the economic ladder and making the level of human capital higher. Emergency Relief and Financial Help (ER) provide monetary assistance to the needy families to meet their emergency requirements such as rental and utility bills payment. This help is offered on a one-time basis in most of the cases as the respondent T said in this regard,

*I would say there is no specific help, but we have a relief organization which help people who are in need however there is an eligibility criterion for them to meet and acquire the help from ICNA Relief. New immigrants can get up to \$1000 one time financial help if they fulfil the criteria set by ICNA Relief.*

Another respondent K pointed towards collection and distribution of Zakat (a form of alms or religious tax that one has to pay over a certain property) and told, ‘ICNA has a branch for relief work (that) collects zakat and other donations from the community. If they need any support, then they are being supported by the ICNA and do help them in daily expenses’. However, as IRC receives a large number of applications from needy Muslims, it provides one-time monetary relief from its Domestic Zakat fund. A detail of Zakat distribution from 2014-2018 is provided in table 4 shows that 279 families are supported in the given period.

**2) PROVIDING COUNSELLING/REFERRAL SERVICE FOR JOB-HUNTING**

When participants were asked about the work opportunities ICNA may offer to settle newcomer; T informed that they ‘do not have any job opportunity but we guide them and counsel them to have a better job opportunity’. In this context, A further augmented,

*“We have connections to all settlement agencies and we have regular contact with these settlement agencies whenever any of the new immigrants come and say that they are looking for a job can you help us when we refer them to these settlement agencies and tells them to take care of them so this way we are helping the families to find employment.”*

**3) PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE EDUCATION**

ICNA fosters economic integration indirectly by providing opportunities to enhance skills as A said, “If you really look at ICNA Relief as the main organization, we are doing

*a lot of educational programmes internationally in all the countries wherever we are working we are giving support for the education of the needy families in all these 13 to 14 countries where we are working. We are supporting schools; we support for teachers, we support for students, for teachers, for scholarships, these are the main objectives in our international programmes so internationally we are making a big contribution in the field of education”.*

The goal of the education department in ICNA is to plan and facilitate the members for their self-development through traditional and modern methods. Document analysis showed that major activities include study circles, regional and central training programmes and conferences. Learning and awareness can reduce immigrants’ issues in particular and human problems in general [33], [34]. Recent global political shifts also stressed education worldwide [35], [36].

**V. DISCUSSION**

The present study showed that ethnic community organizations serve as a site for socio-cultural, economic and political continuity. Findings showed that Muslim community organizations offer guidance in a new, unfamiliar environment, as reflected in [11]. ICNA’s provision of opportunities to celebrate festivals, facilitating and guiding during Ramadan and networking of newcomers with others help new immigrants to maintain cultural identity. ICNA helped Muslim families to settle their issues related to parent-children conflicts which they had to face due to a new environment. ICNA’s role in introducing newcomers with Canadian norms prepares transnational Muslims to integrate easily and become an active member of Canadian society. It may accelerate the integration process affecting local community attitudes. This finding is empirical evidence of what [37] viewed. Besides, ICNA’s role in propagating various skills may help newcomers to combat with cultural shocks and become a psychologically strong human being and consequently, a successful active citizen [38]–[40].

Present findings highlight the significant role of organizations as sites of active citizenship and are in line with [41] definition of active citizenship. It can be inferred from the findings that civic engagement could be an entry point to a political career later on as earlier studies showed that religious commitment in the form of prayers or volunteering were positively associated with their participation in politics. It is also worth mentioning that no Islamic law, no constitution and any act can be beneficial and useful until it is associated with such a group who is the practical portrait of all doings while influencing and inspiring the surroundings to be a practical preacher of each action and movement. The main objective of Islamic jurisprudence is to train one particular nation and prepare them to reform the world [42]. Muslims in America, Britain, Netherland, Germany and Australia were found actively involved in ethnoreligious organizations, and their participation was positively correlated with their political trust affecting their political activity [11], [21], [24], [25]. The present study provides counter-evidence from Canada for



S No	Title of the Workshop	Date	#of seniors participated
<b>Online Skill Development</b>			
1	Introduction to Computers	Oct 22	5
2	Introduction to Computers	Oct 30	12
3	Files & Folders	Nov 06	08
4	Using Internet & Email	Nov 13	07
5	Using Internet & Email	Nov 20	09
6	Using Internet & Email	Nov 27	06
7	Using Different Programs	Dec 04	10
8	Using Different Programs	Dec 11	07
<b>Title of the Workshop</b>			
<b>Elder Abuse Awareness</b>			
9	Elder abuse awareness 101	Sep 28	15
10	Financial abuse awareness & Power of Attorney	Nov 28	15
11	Money & Time management; Legal resources	Jan 08	11
12	Communication in Healthy relationships, Self-esteem & Empowerment	Feb 12	11
13	Communication in Healthy relationships, Self-esteem & Empowerment	Feb 14	20
<b>Healthy living</b>			
14	Healthy living (Heart disease, Stroke etc. & Lifestyle changes)	Nov 24	17
15	Healthy living (Heart disease, Stroke etc. & Lifestyle changes)	Dec 19	29
16	Dimensions of Wellness	Jan 10	10
17	Dimensions of Wellness	Feb 28	05
18	Exercise, Health & Falls Prevention	Mar 16	09
<b>Self-awareness &amp; Self-care</b>			
19	Seniors Mental health, Myths of ageing, Self-awareness, Self-care	Oct 02	15
20	Stress Management	Nov 16	05
21	Self-esteem & Confidence building	Dec 18	16
22	Stress management	Jan 10	10
23	Well-being & Happiness	Jan 31	04
<b>Career skills development</b>			
24	Resume & accomplishment statements	Dec 18	16
25	Communication skills & Career	Jan 03	16
			<b>288</b>

the negative perceptions of Muslim organizations in public as socially segregated sites. The role of ICNA in intercommunity services emerged as bridge between cross-cultural communities and mainstream community and is in complete harmony with Newton's (1999) stance that organizations have not only internal effects but also external ones on their active members, "Internally, organisations ... socialise them into a democratic culture and teach them the subtleties of trust and cooperation. Moreover, ICNA's step to keep its relief and volunteering work open for all Canadians, and is a move towards bridging between new immigrants and the local community. Canadian model of integration is distinctive and ideal for many other multicultural areas of the world; however, a new vision is necessary to be augmented which focuses on how to maximally utilise the potential of ethnic community organizations to enhance and accelerate the integration process. Given the present role of ICNA, such organizations should be involved in a systematic immigrant settlement. The social capital of these organizations in the form of a set of resources and services may be utilised in the mainstream efforts on the subject.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present research explored the potential of ICNA in socio-cultural, economic and political integration of transnational Muslims in Canada. Findings revealed that ICNA could serve in promoting integration in all three spheres

and prominently actively contribute to political integration through its widespread civic engagement. While researchers believe that these findings cannot speak for all Muslim community organizations due to its methodological limitation of the convenient sample, they do draw attention to a crucial yet often overlooked nuance in the public debate around ethnoreligious community organizations in Canada: many Muslim community organizations act as agents of citizenship. They often provide low-threshold entry points for Muslims' activism and community-based volunteering; they offer a platform for civic participation with generally increasing cross-community engagement and relationship building. As the ethnoreligious and culturally diverse immigrants will be a larger portion of Europe, America and North America, present findings may serve as a guide for all multicultural countries to make the most of community organizations to run the country smoothly and successfully. Future research is needed to understand the perception of service users to substantiate the findings of the present research.

## APPENDIX

Table of senior connect workshops is given at the top of the previous page.

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