

Contributions of women in the sultanate of oman



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After the accession of His majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said in 1970 Oman transformed from a rudimentary single economy that lacked all sorts of public amenities and modern infrastructure to a modern and diversified economy aided by the wise leadership of his Majesty. The availability of oil revenues and the importance given to education in the post 1970 period accelerated the development process.

For women in Oman, the new era started when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said began the process of Renaissance. The result seen today is because of his firm belief in the future of Oman and its men and women. Women are encouraged to work shoulder to shoulder with their male counter parts.

Omani women today are seen in different professions such as, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, business leaders, and teachers. Omani women are found in the army and police, private and public sectors, and most importantly, in senior government positions. While there are no official figures available, it is said that Oman has the highest number of working women among the AGCC states. (Source: Oman Tribune, 30 September 2007)

Purpose of the study

This conceptual paper addresses the following issues

factors that encourage women to pursue various careers

role and contributions of Omani women in the Sultanate

obstacles hindering women's progress

Recommendations

Factors that encourage women to pursue various careers:

Factors which encourage women to work and achieve economic independence and leave a significant mark on the society are mainly: support of women from the Islam religion and the Holy Quran, the wise leadership of his majesty under which thrust has been given to education and Omanization, setting up of Women's Association and favorable labour laws.

Rights of women as stated in Islam

Islam accords equals rights to men and women. Female education in the Islamic world was inspired by Prophet Muhammad [HYPERLINK " http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad's_wives"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad's_wives) [HYPERLINK " http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad's_wives"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad's_wives) s (PBUH) wives: Khadijah, a successful businesswoman, and Aisha, a renowned hadith scholar and military leader. According to a Hadith attributed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he praised the women of Medina because of their desire for religious knowledge:[18]

An indicator of the attitude of the Quran to women in the workplace is indicated by the quotes used to justify women working. Khadijah (Prophet Muhammad's(PBUH) wife), who was an eminent business woman. Sitna Khadijah is called up as a role model for women.

Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) encouraged Muslims, men and women alike, to seek and pursue knowledge. The Holy Quranic verses and Hadiths can be cited to demonstrate this fundamental right to knowledge. " Say: My Lord, increase my knowledge" (Holy Koran xx: 1, 14). " God will exalt to high ranks <https://assignbuster.com/contributions-of-women-in-the-sultanate-of-oman/>

those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge” (Holy Koranlv11: 11). “ Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” (Hadith).” The search for knowledge is a duty of every Muslim, male and female”(Hadith).

Role of His Majesty

His Majesty in His speech: “ The education of girls is never absent from our mind, since women form half of our society.” Rapid strides in educational development were taken after Sultan Qaboos assumed power in 1970. In the year 1970 there were only three schools and no colleges or universities. By the year 1985 the number increased to 588 schools and by 2006 – 07, there were 1053 schools enrolling a total of 5, 63, 602 students and employing a teaching staff of 44, 514.

To support the role of women, the Omani government has set a number of programs such as a network of modern health services and social services throughout the country aimed at improving the advancement of women. Undoubtedly, Omani women have been liberated and accorded their respect as equal partners in Omani society under the leadership of His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos.

Omanization

Omanization Policy was introduced in 1988 as a long-term process of committed vision and mission. This is a key development policy influencing the employment scenario of the country. Omanization plan is seen as a national objective in order to stop the continuation of the country’s

dependence on the expatriate manpower by substituting Omani nationals for foreign labor.

To this effect, legislation concerning employment contained in the Omani Labor Law states that preference should be given to Omani nationals. This mandate is enforced by the Government's Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor by specifying the ratio of Omanization to be achieved in the private sector taking into account the number of Omani graduates graduating annually from the various educational institutes

Education

Education in Oman is a fundamental right for each and every Omani citizen. The importance of educating and developing the country's national human resources has been one of the main aims and policies of His Majesty's government . In accordance with His Majesty's directives, a network of modern primary and secondary education establishments for girls and boys has been extended across the whole country, catering to even remote villages. Educational progress has been phenomenal. Women have an equal access to educational opportunities. For the academic year 2008 - 2009 275, 229 males and 265, 103 females are enrolled in Government schools for general education. For the academic year 2008 - 2009 7, 298 and 4, 033 female students are enrolled in Sultan Qaboos University and Colleges of Applied Sciences respectively which is very close to the number of enrollments of the opposite gender.

Role of Support Services

The aims of the Directorate is to set up programs for the care of mothers and children, the eradication of illiteracy, education, the development of traditional and modern handicraft skills, the promotion of healthy and hygienic environment, the teaching of survival skills, and the cultivation of women's minds and roles as citizens of a modern developing society.

Omani Women's Association, the first of its kind in the country was founded in 1971 and is managed as a not for-profit organization. The Omani Women's Association acts in collaboration with the efforts and support of the government to carry out a great number of activities such as literacy classes, provision of handicrafts skills and family care programmes.. It is envisaged that the Women's Association could be instrumental in providing a network for Omani women in management, and to offer the much needed support for their development in the workplace. These programmes enhance the role of Omani women in Sultanate.

Women's Leadership

41. 9% women (Omanis and Expatriates) are employed in civil services out which the major share is of the Omani women. One and two Omani women are employed in the Special and Ambassador grade respectively with no expatriate females in this grade. Omani (16, 389) and expatriate (1, 749) women are primarily employed in Grade 6 of Civil Services in 2008 .

Economic growth and diversification

The availability of oil revenues has made it possible for Oman to develop its economy, educate its people and offer a relatively comfortable standard of

living. This however, has not rendered a total reliance and dependence on oil revenues, rather the government of Oman has been pursuing economic diversification and privatization programs as a measure of maintaining available and sustainable economy for its people.

Labor Laws pertaining women

Labor laws are favorable Omani women . They ensures equality in the workplace and employment in Oman does not discriminate on gender and exercises a sound policy of equal employment opportunity and equal pay act. An entire section in the Oman Labor Law is dedicated to the employment of women. For example, Articles 80 to 82 in the Oman Labor Law clearly safe guard the rights and working conditions of Omani women (Oman Labor Law). Women can avail special leaves such as maternity leave and leave upon death of husband, and a special provision that allows working women to request leave of absence (up to four years) without pay to accompany a spouse who is posted abroad. Working mothers who return to work while continuing to breast feed are allowed to leave work an hour early each day for six months to feed their babies.

The working hours in the government (public) sector are conducive to working women. Government employees work from 7: 30 a. m. – 2: 30 p. m. Saturday through Wednesday, and Thursday and Friday are days off from work. Such working hours allow parents, particularly working mothers, to spend time with their children.

With all the above factors Omani women have occupied different professions and have contributed to the progress of society.

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Role and contributions of Omani women in the Sultanate

Today Omani women are in key positions starting at the Ministerial posts. Dr Rawiyah bint Saud Al Busaidiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Dr Rajiha Bint Abdulamir bin Ali Minister of Tourism, Dr Shariffa bint Khalfan Al Yahya Minister of Social development, Sheikha Aisha bint Khalfan Al Siyabiya, Chairperson of Public Authority for Craft Industry, all hold crucial portfolios.

At all levels women are found to hold responsible positions today. Health, Education, banks are the leading sectors. Omani women are active voters as well as candidates who have served terms in the Majlis A'shura. The Majlis A'shuras members represent the Sultanates wilayats. Omani women exercising their voting rights prove their equal status. Omani womens membership of the Majlis A'Shura dates from 1994.

Omani women are also represented at Diplomatic circle as His Majesty appointed the first woman ambassador by appointing her as ambassador to the Netherlands in September 1999.

In the Legal area also a growing presence of women is seen. In April 2009 First Omani women was appointed as Director of public prosecution Directorate in the Wilayat of Barkha.

Women have served in the ROP for over 35 years and their contribution is growing with new development and experience. Women Police traffic patrols are introduced which is in its first phase now that is limited to the Governorate of Muscat.

In the field of fine arts Omani women have been reaching out to international audience. Works of Omani female artists, artisans, sculptress, photographers have been around to other countries for exhibitions. Omani actresses have won accolades for their performance on stage and screen.

The Royale Oman Symphony Orchestra has harnessed the talent of some wonderful female musicians. During 2007-2008 the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and Syria's Mari orchestra with Maestro Raad Khalaf performed a joint concert featuring 50 female musicians the first time an event of this kind has been staged in the Gulf.

Dr Mariam Al Waili is a Senior Specialist in Nutritional Medicine. She feels that Health sector is a suitable place for women to play their essential role in society. There are more opportunities available than even before and a high demand for qualified and skilled practitioners. Due to the dramatic rise of several diets related chronic diseases, she dreams to see specialized Nutritional Medicine and education centers in the country that can provide adequate treatment and cost effective supplements.

Her Highness Sayyida Zeyana Ali Al said is an Air Traffic Controller for the last 14 years. She was selected to study in UK and underwent all the 4 stages of training in Air Traffic Control. According to her the 2 qualities in an ATC would require is Multi tasking and quick thinking. She needed to work in shift, needed a lot of focus to talk to pilots at the same time, keep abreast of information of all aircrafts and work harder to make Air raffic less congested. She thanks His Majest Sultan Qaboos to have given women a chance to prove their capabilities in all of these careers.

Barka Al Barky studied Social Science and after her Post graduation moved to Oman in 1976. She took up employment with UN Development Programme and worked till 1993. She helped in development and coordinating UN Agencies contribution to Omani development efforts in all fields of economy from fisheries, agriculture, tourism and industrial planning, civil aviation and meteorology systems. She was the Director of Administration and Personnel at Al Shatti Hospital. In the last 3 years she is mainly supporting the blind community across Oman.

Ahlam Al Jahdhami is an Engineer who is today Sales and Client support Manager

At Falcon Oilfield Services (National Wireline Logging Company). She provides hi-tech exploration and production services to oil companies in the region. After a degree in Biomedical Engineering she wanted a career as a real engineer. Opportunities in the region were limited. There was a lack of other female engineers from the AGCC and she was one of the first Omani women to survive in this environment. The sharp end of the oil industry is never described as woman friendly or even just friendly. It is still a very male dominated and conservative business. She was working and sometimes living in remote camps or on offshore rigs kilometers away from the comforts of home. The work was very physical and set in some of the harshest environments on earth. However she wants to continue to share her passion for science and engineering and encourage more young women to get involved and contribute in a real and practical way.

Dr. Wafaa Al Harasy is a consultant and director of the ROP Forensic Laboratory. She did her Bsc in Egypt and completed her MSc and Phd in United Kingdom. Practically Forensic work is mostly a mans world. There are times when the Forensic team is required to attend crime scenes at unsocial hours of the day and at isolated locations.

But she enjoys her job because of these daily challenges and considers herself lucky not only to be part of this specialized skilled team but also one of the founders of this profession in Oman. She wants to be able to contribute to Oman and have a State of art Forensic laboratory and achieve an international recognition for its services.

Maliha Al Kharoussi is an E business entrepreneur and CEO of Arabian booking. net a new resource for business, leisure and family travelers. She wishes to add value to the core industries that all use i. e. hospitality, travel and tourism. By bringing these 3 major sectors in one easy to access and use website she will help those who want value for money in quickest possible way. She wishes to help and strengthen Oman as leading tourism destination in areas of regular tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism.

Ghada Al Harthy is the proprietor of café G Patisserie & Café G Catering. From aviation to catering she wanted a career not just a job. She strongly feels that business has no gender. As long as the business is legal and ethical there is nothing to stop us from achieving the goals. She believes that under the wise leadership of His Majesty whohas a strong advocate for

women in business, we are amongst the most fortunate in the Gulf as far as equal opportunities are concerned.

The opportunities are endless. But there is more to be achieved and that is why His Majesty has initiated yet another step toward the advancement of women in Oman.

There are various factors that have hindered the progress of Omani women.

Obstacles hindering women's progress

Traditional Mind set of Arab men

The Arab traditional attitude asserts that women are inferior to men and incapable of pursuing a professional career. Such conservative attitudes negate the concept of professional working women in traditional Arab societies, the idea of women working is degrading and a disgrace to some Arab men who consider that it is their responsibility to provide for their wives and family.

The above attitude tends to have a spillover effect at work, whereby male employers regard women as being less capable than men and unfit for responsible positions, claiming that their family obligations take priority; and hence, subjects them to lower productivity and absenteeism (Beck, 1994; Hammoud, 1993). This negative attitude and traditional stereotype towards women in Arab/Islamic societies has been, and still is, a major resisting force to progress for professional working women.

Portrayed Self-image of Women

The inferior self-image of women becomes difficult to overcome considering that it is ingrained and conditioned in their upbringing and social development (Hunsaker & Hunsaker, 1991; Hennig & Jardim, 1977). In traditional Arab-Islamic patriarchal societies, the feminine gender is subordinate, while the masculine is superior and dominant (Magharabi et. al., 1994; Bech, 1994; Hammoud, 1993; Allaghi & Almana, 1984; Gerner, 1984; Al-Hatimy 1983). Generally, men are held responsible for providing the necessities of life, thus to work outside the home. On the other hand, women are expected to serve their husbands and children at home, especially since women are not required by the Islamic law (Shari'a) to financially support the family. In this subordinate position, women become victims of their own gender (Mernissi, 1985, Rassam, 1984). Hammoud's (1993) dynamic study on the role of women in higher education management in the Arab region confers that the most fatal obstacle which prevents women from realizing their utmost professional achievement is the self-image of a woman portrayed as inferior to men, incapable of being socially and financially independent, and hence depends on them to care for and protect them.

Human Resource Policies and Strategies

The lack of proper human resource policies and strategies addressing women workers has proven to be a major obstacle to women's progress and development. The majority of these workers are concentrated in the lower echelons of the organizational hierarchy with a small percentage in decision making positions 12, 072 out of 51, 229 Omani employees in the wage group of 120 Rials were Omani women, followed by the 200 - 300 bracket in which

3349 Omani women are employed out of a total of 15, 665 local workers in that bracket. Only 25 Omani Women fall in the wage group of 2000 + in the private sector out of a total of 589.

. In Oman, the absence of human resource policies and strategies to promote the recruitment and development of female managers at work is a deterrent to gender diversity. The work environment and culture are not conducive to promoting women in management. This acts as a ‘ glass ceiling” preventing women’s accessibility to top management positions. For example, there are no programs to facilitate the advancement of women as role models, absence of mentoring programs, lack of management training programs, and shunning of affirmative action.

Lack of Professional a Women’s Network

The lack of a professional women’s network in Oman creates a major void for women aspiring to professional managerial positions. The absence of female mentor-protégé relationship makes it difficult for women to develop the requisite attitude, skills and abilities for leadership and management positions. This results in a disparate situation and a state of confusion; because after all, women are entering a male dominated domain coupled with a traditional value system and a culture that tends to shun women from pursuing management careers.

Work Family Conflict

There is an interdependence of work and family life which is especially problematic for women as a result of their greater family responsibilities. Traditionally, women have had the primary responsibility for housekeeping

and childcare which do not diminish when they are employed outside the home. Furthermore, the responsibilities they carry are simultaneous while men's are more typically sequential. i. e. a woman may be called in at work regarding a sick child whereas typically a father may fulfill role obligations after work hours.

Recommendations

The hindrances should be tackled efficiently from all angles like Government, organization and the individual. In Oman the availability and accessibility to all levels of education along with equal opportunities in the job market is more so in the urban area. In the rural interiors the importance given to education takes a back seat and therefore the opportunities in the job market is relatively less? Thus it is important to ensure that rural areas should be focused for literacy campaigns. It is urged that educational opportunities to Omani women should never be compromised, but rather be improved. Meanwhile, special measures should be undertaken to encourage and promote women's access to scientific, managerial, technical, and vocational disciplines in order to develop the requisite skills and extend their opportunities for employment in non-traditional occupations.

. It is necessary to institute awareness programs of employment opportunities and benefits to Omani women in all the different regions of Oman so that their participation in work force will further increase. This can be achieved through the utilization of the local and international media as a means for promoting the role of working women in the workplace and the values of Arab women in changing society and their integration in the

development process. Other measures include setting up quota systems to ensure the employment and representation of women in the workforce.

Since the Omani society is based on strong family ties the centrality of the family accompanied by close relationship makes it the responsibility for parents and parents in law of working women to help with child care.

However it is recommended that the Organizations and Government also take the responsibility of family support and Child care services and special attention is directed to the provision of a social infrastructure that will enable women to work, such as professional day care centers onsite, kindergartens, and adequate maternity leave. The availability of such support services is a tangible expression of organizational recognition of the needs of professional women. Consequently, it undoubtedly can make a great difference to the capacity of women to manage multiple roles

It is very important that Omani women should think positive about them first and convince others that they are empowered and deserve to be trust worthy.

Ghada Al Harthy proprietor of café G Patisserie and Café G Catering says” I hope to one day fund and support my own training facilities for younger generation of Omanis so that they may also have a brighter future ahead of them. I also want to start new business ventures that will allow me to create career opportunities for the blind and disabled members of our society. We can all make a positive change starting with our thoughts which lead to our actions.”

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has always emphasized the importance of the woman's role in the country's growth: " Many years ago, I said that if the energy, capability and enthusiasm of women were excluded from a country's active life, then that country would be depriving itself of 50 per cent of its genius. I have taken very good care that this should not happen to Oman, and I look forward to the further progress of women in my country with the greatest pleasure and confidence."