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Voices of Oman Magazine

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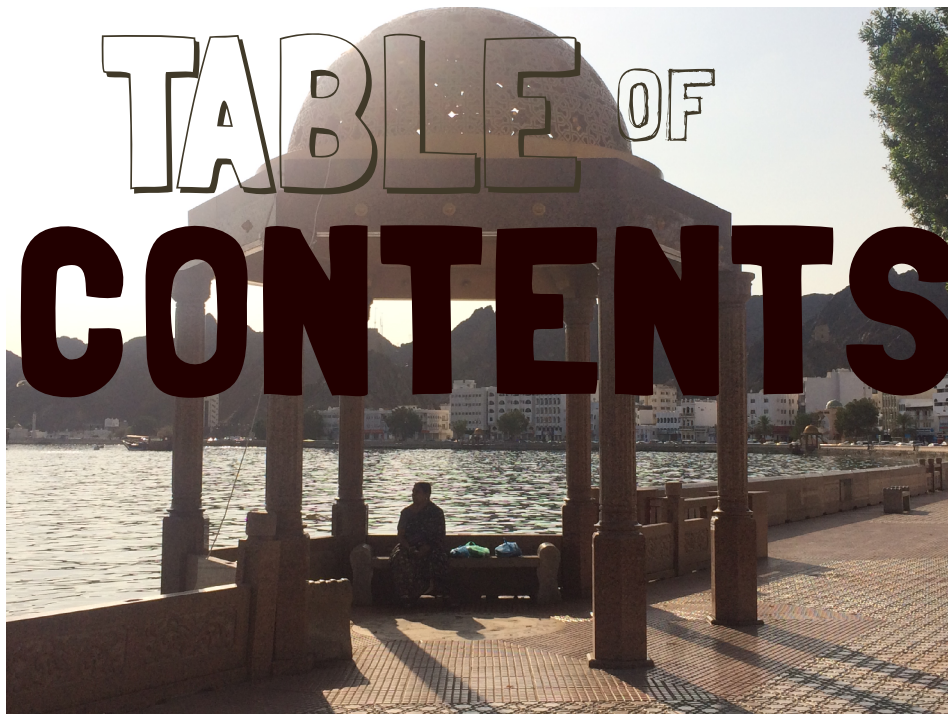
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VOICES OF OMAN

By: ASHLEY MÉNDEZ

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WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN OMAN

BY: SUSAN MUBARAK

MUSCAT DAILY

Oman has been a pioneer in the Gulf when it comes to women rights. His Majesty the Sultan has worked hard to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women. Forty years ago there were no schools for girls in Oman.

Today, there are more women than men enrolled in institutions of higher education. Our participation in the labor force is also increasing on a daily basis.

However, like most countries we have our issues when it comes to women. Although the Basic Law of Oman

prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, women still face legal discrimination under the personal status law of Oman.

It's a sore subject because Oman's interpretation of the Islamic Sharia law is what controls the personal status law in all matters related to marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. I have great respect for the Sharia law, but I think people should have a choice.

It's legally possible in Oman for a man to divorce his wife with two witnesses, then go home and pretend nothing happened. Who's going to tell her? There are definitely gaps in the system, and according to

my sources some practices tend to vary by province.

The reason this issue isn't discussed publicly is because very few men abuse their privileges when it comes to marriage and divorce, but that does not in any way justify these discriminatory practices.

As far as I'm concerned, every human has the right to be in control of their own life. Obtaining a woman's signature on her marriage and divorce papers should be mandatory.

Another issue that drives me up the wall is that a man can legally take on an additional wife without informing his first wife. I know for a fact that many men abuse this right. The personal status law of

Oman is very vague about polygamy.

It only specifies that a man should treat all his wives equally.

Several international human rights' reports state that women in Oman are legally restricted from travelling abroad without the permission of a male relative. From my experience, I know this is not true.

Yet another sore subject is marriage to foreigners. It is nearly impossible for an Omani woman to marry a foreigner. It is that if you in the rare case where approval is granted, the woman faces an even bigger battle involving child custody and the ability to sponsor her own kids in Oman.



These figures show the motivation of Omani women in achieving the highest positions in both career and education. In Oman, there are no obstacles to women achieving success in social and professional spheres.



SULTAN QABOOS UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES OMANI WOMEN'S DAY

October 31, 2015

By :Times News Service

In all 1,726 Omani women are now working in various positions at Sultan Qaboos University. The number of female students at SQU as of the 2015-2016 (academic year) is 9,632 and the number of female students that graduated this year is 1,608.

Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) marked Omani Women's Day with a ceremony held under the patronage of Her Highness Sayyida Mona bint Fahad Al Said, assistant vice chancellor for international cooperation.

The ceremony was held to recognize and celebrate Omani women's efforts and contributions to different fields in the Sultanate that have helped in the development of society. The theme of the celebration was "Omani women: Inspiration to generations".

During her address, Her Highness said: "Islam appreciates women since the beginning of Islam, women's status in society has been duly recognized and women were given their rights."

Growing numbers

She emphasized that Omani women have always excelled in society

and are comparable to successful women in other societies and they enjoy a good stature in society, along with opportunities and hold important responsibilities. It is due to their qualifications and capabilities that Omani women have reached high-level positions in career and social spheres.

She pointed out that 1,726 Omani women are now working in various positions at SQU.

"The number of female students at SQU as of the 2015-2016 (academic year) is 9,632 and the number of female students that graduated this year is 1,608. The number of Omani women,

who obtained a PhD this year is 193. Apart from that, 190 women graduated with a Master's degree and 1,113 females with Bachelor's degree.

"These figures show the motivation of Omani women in achieving the highest positions in both career and education. In Oman, there are no obstacles to women achieving success in social and professional spheres.

"Ambitious women, who grab opportunities, can reach heights. If ambitious, any woman can occupy leading posts in political, social, economic and cultural fields in the country," she observed.



OMAN SAIL'S WOMEN SAILING PROGRAMME

February 4, 2016

By T.A. Ameerudheen

Launched in 2011, the Oman Sail Women's Sailing Program aims to empower Omani women and create equal opportunities in the sport. Oman Sail set up a comfortable environment for girls wanting to learn and found the right female instructors to teach Omani girls the nuances of sailing.

The Women's Sailing Program has now become a template for other organizations in Oman and across the Arab world looking to open up opportunities for women. Oman Sail

recruited notable international female sailors as mentors and coaches for the program. These include Shirley Robertson OBE, the first British woman to win two sailing gold medals at consecutive Olympic Games, and Dee Caffari MBE, the first woman to sail single-handedly non-stop around the world in both directions and the only woman to have sailed non-stop around the world three times.

Interview to Nashwa Al Kindi

"I was quite ecstatic when I became the first Arab woman to make the trans-ocean crossing in 2014. It was a big achievement to successfully complete the 850-nautical mile journey across Indian Ocean that started from Mumbai in India, along with British quadriplegic sailor Hilary

Lister aboard a 28ft Dragonfly trimaran. It took nine days for us to complete the sail. I hope my feet will inspire Omani and non-Omani women to go for their dreams and goals. Personally, the feat gave me strength to achieve my ultimate goal—to sail solo around the world."





*Mags Cloud,
From Poland
Six years living in Oman.*

1. As a woman, how can you describe your experience of living in Oman for the past years? I have been in Oman since 2010. I am very happy to be here. I know this will sound crazy, but I do feel more respected as a female here in Oman, than in the west, especially by younger crowd. As a western female, there are really no limitations of what I can and cannot do in Oman.

2. How does coming from a more western culture affected that experience? How does it change it? Is it harder? In some ways it's easier. As a westerner, I am socially accepted to behave like westerner. There is no strict dress code in Oman, so I can pretty much wear what I want. The learning curve was to understand my limits and figure out what I was comfortable with. For example: when I attend an official function in an Omani house, especially if there are other females present, I cover up. I do it as a sign of respect to the ladies.. I am usually not required to follow the male/female segregation rule, anywhere. I am free to choose, and still, the special perks of being a girl

in Oman, are still available to me. I can enjoy separate checkout at the supermarket, it's not compulsory (not even for Omani ladies) but it is available. I can refuse to talk to any male official, on the basis that I do not wish to speak with a man, I never queue in the Bank, there is a special, female only counter, and last, but not least, Omani guy would rather die than let a girl pay the bill, or, do any kind of heavy working! Forget about carrying shopping bags!

Also, when invited to a traditional Omani home for a function, if the family sticks to male/female segregation system, it does not apply to me.

3. What is the current status of Women's in Oman in terms of rights, equality, empowerment etc.?

There are lots of empowered females in Oman. Lots of ladies CCO's, government, ministry workers, and scientists. Girls in Oman love their fashion, they hang out together in cafes and in general they are enjoying their lives. There actually more females in Higher education in Oman than males.

4. Do you believe women in Oman are oppressed in any way?

I would say no differently, than

anywhere else in the world.

That said, one of the things that I do find upsetting, is the fact that it is illegal in Oman to have a child outside of marriage. Females are being asked at the hospitals for marriage certificates, before they will be admitted to the delivery room. It is very rare that this happens, and if it does, it hits the most unfortunate in the society. Usually, the families make sure that whoever the father is, will marry the girl before delivery. Unfortunately, this doesn't leave much room to man oeuvre, in difficult life situations. Western females are also required to produce marriage certificate, if they wish to deliver their child in the Sultanate.

5. Do you think women in Oman feel oppressed? Ha, I guess this question should be directed to them. In general, I do not think they feel oppressed.

6. Can you say there is some type of gender equality in Oman? Yes definitely.

The free education is available equally to male and female population. Oman has an equal pay policy, Omani women can drive, work and travel freely, and they can vote.



WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT THE CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN OMAN?

Tariq Al Haremi

From Oman

Currently working for Times of Oman

Well I can tell you than in our modern society women have equal rights as men. His Majesty the Sultan strives for gender equality. We have ministers and undersecretaries as women. CEO, managers, entrepreneurs, influential women. Women in sports as well.

We also have women as members of the Majlis Al Shura (Shura Council - a sort of parliament with members representing each wilaya or town) as well as the state council.

He said: "We renew our call to the Omani Women's Associations and other social organisations, to give a higher priority to instilling awareness in

female citizens about the need to adapt to the realities of today. This will enable women everywhere, to fulfil their vital role in society – a role for which we have endeavoured to prepare them from the very beginning. We have given them the opportunity to study, work, engage in social service and contribute their opinions through the Majlis Ash'shura. Today we are honoring them once again by appointing them to the Council of State, so that we can improve their status and provide them with more opportunities to help serve, develop and improve their society alongside their greater role of building the family and implanting a sense of belonging and allegiance in the hearts and minds of the rising generations."

Also His Majesty the Sultan at the Royal speech on the occasion of the annual session

convening of the Council of Oman in November 2009 said, "Since the early Renaissance we have attached care for the participation of Omani women in the march of the Blessed Renaissance, so we have provided them with education, training and employment opportunities and supported their role and status in society. We have also stressed on the need for their contribution in various development fields. We have facilitated this through regulations and laws that guarantee their rights and explain their duties in order to be able to develop their inner abilities, expertise and skills to build their country and raise its status. We are continuing on this path, God willing."

Women get equal opportunities in employment as well, sometimes they get the job more than men. Females in schools and colleges outweigh males by a large margin.



BLOG POSTS

HOW TO LIVE LIKE AN OMANI PRINCESS – WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN OMAN

I love Oman, and have applied to become an Omani citizen... and I have no hesitation towards doing this. The passport I currently hold is Canadian, and I am aware, of the rights I am risking, changing my nationality. But the change in nationality is essential if I want the words I am to say to have any weight---an outsider can complain and say what needs to change, but only a citizen has the right to demand that change. I am a hypocrite otherwise, to speak about Omani women and what they want, what they tell me they want, and ask the government for something. I understand my decision and stand by it. I believe in the noble intentions of many in government (okay---not all---but the Canadian government was not all that great either while I lived there...;) and will support them towards strengthening and amending the laws already in place towards women's rights in Oman.

When it comes to equal opportunity, Oman has female Ministers, Shura Council members, and a female workforce whose legal rights are protected by law. Oman's legal system does not require women to be obedient to men and "it provides women with the explicit right to work outside the home.

Further, Oman's Ministry of National Economy has started to issue booklets to make Omani women aware of their rights to work, and as employees in Oman, to own property, to open and close their own business files... ect... or attend educational training.

Under the personal status law Omani women have some key rights:

- 1.) Omani women may sue for divorce (conditions apply)
- 2.) Omani women may refuse potential marriage partners selected by their family
- 3.) A marriage they were forced into by their family but did not desire can be annulled even if consummated
- 4.) Omani women can choose their own marriage partner and sign their own marriage contract, although, to make their marriage legally valid a guardian must preside over the registration of the marriage contract. If a guardian is not present, or objects to the marriage on grounds not accordance with the law, the judge may sign the contract. In place of the guardian. This is in accordance with articles 9&10 of the personal status law.
- 5.) Omani women may obtain identification and passports (although apparently married women do need their husband's written permission by law to apply for a passport----unmarried-no).
- 6.) Omani women have freedom of movement, in they can drive or travel in-country and abroad without permission provided they have obtained an id card and a passport.
- 7.) Having obtained the age of maturity, 18, Omani women may own property, vote, and live independently.



DHOFARI GUCCI – DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN DHOFAR

Dear Readers,

Hundreds of thoughts are spinning through my head right now and I don't even know where to start.

1. In Oman women definitely have legal rights. No doubt about that. We can work, drive, vote, ask for a divorce, etc. Take a moment out to think about women in Saudi Arabia. They cannot drive (not even expat women), they must wear the abaya everywhere (it's illegal not to), they can only work in certain places, schools and colleges are gender-segregated, women cannot go out alone, they practically have to carry their marriage certificate around wherever they go to be ready for the Moral Police (or whatever they're called ...). Saudi society is sick. Thank you Sultan Qaboos for being the open minded man that you are. We are so blessed to have such an enlightened leader.

2. Government-wise, I think our country is doing pretty good. My rants today are not against the government. They are against men and society. People. No matter how 'free' a woman is in Oman legally, there are always men in her life controlling her. There are men in my life controlling me (*yes even me after spending 5 years abroad on my own, I came back to a society where men immediately assumed the duties of controlling me and making decisions about my life*), but today I'll be complaining on behalf of all the beautiful intelligent women around me. My friends, sisters, cousins, colleagues, aunts, etc. Today I'll be talking about Salalah mostly because I cannot speak for the rest of Oman. Do you want to know how many men I know who've spoken these exact words to the women in their life 'We've allowed you to work and drive. What more do you want?'. So many times I've wanted to shout at them **'WE WANT MORE'**. Who the hell gave you the right to 'allow' or 'not allow'. Who gave you the right to control someone else's life?

- *Nadia,*
Oman



WE WANT MORE!



My EXPERIENCE; My VOICE

From the first moment I stepped into Oman I was amazed by everything I saw. First, people didn't look at us differently, I didn't feel like I was a minority or "the tourist". Also, I was surprised with the respect that the men in Oman not only treat us, but also saw us. I thought that because we were dressed differently, and maybe a little more revealing they would act somehow attracted to us. I had this in mind because of a previous experience I had when I traveled last spring break to Cuba. Men there treat the females like sexual objects. This made the whole trip unpleasant, so seeing the contrast between that and Oman made me enjoy the trip a lot more. All of this was a huge stereotype break down for me.

I have to admit that beside all of this, my biggest take away from Oman is the current situation of women and their empowerment. This aspect gave the trip a very special focus and perspective. I was so surprised that they live such a normal life. They seem so free, and not oppressed at all. I couldn't believe when I saw them driving, even when there was a man in the passenger seat. Seeing them using cellphones and walking around without a man was such a relief for me. My eyes couldn't believe what they were seeing, it was like I was under a spell all this time. A spell that prevented me to see a reality.

After listening to the woman at the mosque I realize that not all of the women in the Middle East feel oppressed and need our help. Actually in Oman, women feel even more equal than women here in America. The fact that they have equal pay and here it is still subject of discussion says a lot about where women are really oppressed and treated as unequal. Also, it got to me what she said about their clothing not representing oppression but all the opposite. I never thought that they would see the way they dress as a way of self-respect and love to themselves and their God. This made me think how we think we are modern because we are able to wear clothes that show more skin without realizing that sometimes they show a little too much. We are used to look at them above the shoulder, like we are better than them, when in reality we are the ones who oppress just in a different way. We are slaves of everyday fashion. Some other times we are slaves of society and we treat it as sexual objects. Yes, they are all covered but at least they treat themselves as the biggest treasure of all. While here girls want to dress provocative without realizing how much they value.

