**Embassy of India**

**Muscat**

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**Press Release**

**India Embassy traces the Journey of Indian Women through the Ages**

As a part of its year-long celebration of 70 years of Independence of India, which commenced in August 2017 and will conclude in August 2018, the Indian Embassy, Muscat, organised a Cultural Show to present ‘Glimpses of Indian Women Through the Ages’ at the Embassy premises on 13th May 2018, which was attended by 120 prominent Omani women and women from diplomatic corps and Indian and other expatriate communities. The Cultural Show was organised by wife of Ambassador of India in collaboration with a number of accomplished women from Indian community, led by Mrs. Madhulika Gupta and Mrs. Seema Choudhery, who worked imaginatively and tirelessly to present the mesmerising Show.

Indian Embassy in Muscat has been organising a series of cultural, economic and community events as part of celebration of 70 years of India’s Independence, including dance and music performances, essay and quiz competitions, exhibition of paintings, seminars and workshops with a view to highlight the journey of India as a nation since its Independence in 1947. Indians have also resolved to build by August 2022, when India will celebrate 75 years of independence and freedom, a New India, which will be clean and free of corruption, poverty, terrorism, communalism, and casteism.

There is a divergence in perception of the status of Indian women among the people in Oman, including among the expatriate communities, which is based on stereotypical presentations of Indian women in media and lack of information about the revolutionary changes in the status of Indian women which have taken place since independence. The Embassy, therefore, took the initiative of presenting a balanced, nuanced and accurate picture of the status of Indian women, as evolved over 5000 years of India’s history.

The status and position of women in India has continued to evolve through Ages which was the theme of the comprehensive presentation made during the Show. It traced evolution in status of Women from Indus Valley Civilisation through Vedic and Post-Vedic period, medieval period, and British colonial rule to post-independence era. While women enjoyed during the ancient age in India a high status in society and participated in all spheres of activities, at par with men, there was a gradual decline in their status and role and during the medieval period the role of women was increasingly restricted. Well-known classical play, Abhigyan Shakuntalam, written by famous poet Kalidasa, was enacted to depict the status of women during the Vedic period, when they wrote religious hymns, participated in philosophical debates, chose their husbands and engaged in other social, economic and religious activities, at par with men.

With gradual social awakening and reforms, advocated by religious and social reform movements, which began in 18th and 19th centuries in India and which campaigned for better position of women in society, the status of women in India began to change. During post-Independence period, supported by constitutional, political, legal and economic measures, adopted by the Government, aimed at guaranteeing equal status and opportunities for women, there have been revolutionary changes in the status of women in India. Today, women in India enjoy status equal to men in every aspect and they have been equally successful as men as soldiers, sportspersons, scientists, professionals and businesspersons, though there are aberrations and exceptions.

It was highlighted by Mrs Sushma Pandey, wife of Ambassador, that in India, with a large population of 1.3 billion, it is natural that there are divergences in the status of women which may vary from family to family, region to region and one strata of the society to other. This is true as much now as it was during the ancient and medieval periods. Even during the medieval period, countless women played leading roles in battlefields, governance, politics, and social and economic activities. This was highlighted through presentations on lives and achievements of a few accomplished women like Razia Sultan, Ahilya Bai Holkar, Rani Rudrama Devi, Mira Bai, Joymoti and Rani Laxmi Bai, who carved a name for themselves in Indian History. These presentations were accompanied by music and dances from the regions to which they belonged.

Mrs Sushma Pandey underlined the fact that the Indian Government has taken a number of steps to ensure that women enjoy a status equal to men and there is no discrimination on the ground of gender. She spoke in particular about the Government’s flagship Scheme ‘Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao’ ‘Educate your daughter, protect your daughter’, stressing that empowering a girl not only empowers a family and the society at large but also the nation and the world. She noted that the equal status of women today in India is self-evident in fact that both the Foreign Minister and Defence Minister of India are women. She stressed that India has, since her independence, experienced revolutionary changes in social, religious, cultural, political and economic spheres and Indian society has overwhelmingly accepted and assimilated these changes though, as natural, there are pockets of resistance; they are exceptions, not norms.

**Muscat, 15th May 2018**