

## THE CONCEPT OF EMANCIPATED AND SELF-RELIANT WOMEN IN DR. RITU KAMRA KUMAR'S THE PRICELESS PETALS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SECTION "FEMININE FINESSE"

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### ABSTRACT

Women's status in a society is an important parameter to measure the progress made by a nation. Today is an era of equality wherein gender disparities are fast fading away. The modern women have come a long way following an arduous path to make their presence felt in almost all spheres of life. With their diligence and dedication they have opened up multiple arenas of avenues for themselves and as such they are moving ahead in life with their heads held high. The impressive strides made by women in male-dominated domains were evident at this year's Republic Day parade where their tri-service contingent led the impressive march past on *Kartavya Path* and female pilots enthralled the spectators with the fly-past. Women nowadays are holding key positions in almost all spheres of life be it politics, administration, social activism and even corporate sector. They are making their presence felt in the hitherto uncharted arenas defying stereotyped roles and making sustained efforts to reshape their destiny. The present paper makes an attempt to analyze the concept of the confident, independent and liberated woman in Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar's "The Priceless Petals" with emphasis on the section "Feminine Finesse".

**Keywords:** Equality, Diligence, Dedication, Emancipated, Self-Reliant

Women, today, are shedding their apprehensions, breaking the stereotypical mindset and emerging as liberated individuals. The remark about the modern, liberated women who, "are breaking barriers in every field, proving that independence is not just about personal success, but also about transforming societies" (World Economic Forum, 2022), aptly summarizes the position of women in the present times. The modern woman today has emerged as bold and beautiful, charming and confident, aware and awakened. She has a far greater control over her home and professional aspirations. She can be seen openly making choices of her own and even conversing on the diverse and varied topics which were earlier supposed to be forbidden areas. Today she is better equipped to accomplish her dreams. She has created her own support system to cope with the pressures of domestic and professional commitments. The typical stereotyped woman of yesterday has been replaced by her modern version of an independent and confident woman receiving honor and recognition for her outstanding accomplishments.

The first section of "Feminine Finesse" titled "Space for Feminine Sensibility" vocalizes the need for some sort of a space for woman, some 'me time' which can have a therapeutic effect and calm her burdened mind. It discusses the selfless love of a woman who is always busy juggling roles that she performs throughout her life be it as a daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law and more. She wholeheartedly devotes her life to fulfill the various duties entrusted to her by the society and in the process loses her identity. Though this docile and submissive woman of the early times has now emerged as bold, confident and self-reliant woman who works hard trying to balance her role as a homemaker as well as that of a career woman, yet she has to face numerous challenges. While making efforts to maintain a delicate equilibrium between her professional aspirations and domestic responsibilities she often gets disillusioned and disappointed and at the end of the day goes to bed with a mix of emotions. Consequently

she feels the need for “me time” -a time for herself when she can unwind, repose and rejuvenate. This me time can be helpful in acquiring a fresh outlook and a better perspective towards life and relationships. Just going out for a walk, sipping coffee, watching a movie, plugging in ear-phones to listen to her favorite songs, going for a drive or simply a chitchat with friends can help ease out much of the pressure and her thoughts can get sorted she can have a clear vision and a jovial temper.

International Women's Day is celebrated each year on March 08 to recognize and celebrate the achievements of women in various spheres of life. It is true that women today are defying stereotypes and trying to reshape and restructure their destiny as well as identity. They are making sustained efforts to excel in their own fields. But it is a sad reality that in a country like India women are unable to find equal opportunities and hence we find two contrasting pictures of women in our society. On the one hand are the women who are aware and awakened of their rights, women who are self-reliant, bold, confident, and emancipated but on the other hand are the women on whom the light of liberation has not yet ventured. Ironically there are innumerable women working as laborers and housemaids fighting resiliently against all odds not even aware of the fact that there is a day celebrating womanhood. This disparity is a matter of grave concern and raises serious doubts in our minds as to the concept of women empowerment. The section “Celebrating Womanhood in True Sense” emphasizes the need to contemplate and create welfare schemes that can help empower women belonging to the lower strata of the society so that they can become socially and economically independent.

“Today’s Woman is Breaking Stereotype” sheds light on women prioritizing their own needs and interests and inspiring other women to take on leadership roles and be assertive. Women today have embarked themselves on a journey of determination, resilience and purposefulness. They are making commendable achievements in the multiple sectors of life and their impact in these sectors is unquestionable. They are stepping into leadership positions, founding start-ups and demonstrating their efficiency as well as efficacy in many of the traditionally male dominated arenas. Enterprising, charming, cool, confident and self-reliant- women have come a long way. Captain Prem Mathur is India's first woman to be a commercial pilot in Deccan Airways. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw has made an outstanding contribution to biosciences and is ranked among the billionaires of the world as chairman and managing director of Biocon Ltd. Swati Piramal, India's leading scientist and vice-chair person of Piramal Enterprises is involved in healthcare works on public health and innovation and Vinita Gupta CEO Lupin Ltd has carved out a niche for herself in the field of pharmaceuticals in the US. The achievements of all these women are a testimonial that women today are assertive, emancipated and believe in equitable dynamics. They are the women who inspire others to take leadership roles and be self-confident and emphatic. At the same time women have also become aware of the need to connect with one another, to frame a bond of friendship which can help them deal with the pressures of domestic life. Such friendships strengthen their emotional support system and provide them with an outlet share their triumphs and frustrations. The reliability of female friendships helps boost the confidence and infuses a new zeal and positivity into life.

Men often try to silence women who are outspoken. Ironically women face various kinds of barriers when it comes to freedom of opinion and expression. Sadly our own social construct is at fault in making such arguments against women. Mary Wollstonecraft in her famous work “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” talks about the double standards shown by men in encouraging women to indulge in excessive emotion. Women are expected to behave in a modest and polite way and their behavior demands are set of rules to be followed which have

been framed by the conventional society. “Laugh, Wink and Celebrate Womanhood” discusses the display of patriarchy in a male dominated society citing Renuka Chaudhary’s guffaw in the parliament and Priyanka Prakash’s wink as instances of women immodesty hurting the sentiments of the males. It is ironical that we consider ourselves a progressive society yet a guffaw or a wink can overshadow the sense of superiority of the so called patriarchs of the society and even hurt religious sentiments. There are a lot of dos and don’ts that accompany womanhood. The onus of maintaining etiquettes has always fallen on the feminine gender. They are expected to be calm and polite lest their behavior may be judged as unwomanly. Laughter and wink are expressions of women’s right to mirth and merriment. The egocentric males need to understand that the progressive women refuse to be bound by their ineffectual display of ridicule and jibe.

The section “Equal Rights and some Unequal Music” discusses the issue of mood swings and the myth that women are more prone to mood swings as compared to men. Mood-swings refer to significant shifts in a person’s emotional state. They can occur due to many reasons including hormonal changes and ups and downs of life. They can happen to anyone irrespective of gender. Even men are prone to display of erratic behavior as they too have their share of mood changes. It is therefore not just if we target only women for having mood swings. Gender justice entails harmonizing the rights of women and providing them a fair and equitable treatment. It is therefore imperative that women should have the right to be at ease with their mood swings just like men.

The last two write-ups of “Feminine Finesse” beautifully define the essence of womanhood by tracing its traditional and cultural heritage through the two eternal symbols of femininity: the *Bindi* and the *Saree*. The *Bindi* has been an integral part of a woman’s attire in India. It is a symbol of connection to cultural roots, a symbol of heritage and identity. It is symbolic of beauty, femininity and spirituality. In the present times the *Bindi* has become a symbol of women’s empowerment as well as identity. This beautiful dot has transformed itself into various designs, shapes and sizes and has also become a fashion statement. It encourages a woman to embrace and appreciate her femininity. It does not bind a woman to any strict code. Not only Indian women but many European and Western women have been using it to enhance their charm and femininity. Women of different age groups nowadays wear *Bindi* often matching with their outfits or for aesthetic reasons. The youngsters artfully use it as a fashion accessory.

The column “Six Yards of Seamless Style Statement” centers round an eternal Indian symbol of femininity; the *saree* which in the traditional Indian context is regarded as an epitome of grace and elegance. It is an integral part of Indian culture worn proudly by women of all ages, classes and religions. The *saree* has a rich cultural heritage which evolved over centuries. Beyond its traditional significance and aesthetic appeal, the *saree* is also a symbol of self-expression used by many women to express their individuality. Contemporary fashion designers experiment with fabrics, innovative styles and contours to create saris that reverberate with the essence of the modern independent women. In the world of ever-changing fashion, the *saree* is like a timeless garment which enables a woman to assert her individuality with grace and poise. Many influential women have donned the *saree* gracefully asserting their empowerment as well as individuality. Beyond its traditional significance and aesthetic appeal, the *saree* is also a symbol of social and economic empowerment of women.

Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar’s “Feminine Finesse” beautifully celebrates the concept of the emancipated, self-confident and self-reliant women who have worked diligently to live their life with dignity and grace. She puts forward the view that women today believe in sharing their thoughts and feelings without any inhibition because they are aware of the fact

that a strong emotional bond can strengthen a relationship and provide a sense of security as well as support. As such, they effectively communicate their feelings while at the same time create a supportive environment which can lead to better understanding and more trustful relationships. The author has delicately yet meticulously portrayed the myriad aspects of femininity while making a subtle effort to transform the social order. Her lucid and lyrical style at once strikes a chord with the readers. Her reflections of various aspects of femininity highlight her sensitivity as a writer who is conscious of her duty towards the society. The beautiful analogy and philosophical wisdom expressed through her write-ups are intriguing as well as enthralling.

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