



# Dharma's Daughters: Contemporary Indian Women and Hindu Culture

*Sara S. Mitter*

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Women in India today are faced with a major conflict: how to adjust to rapid modernization and industrialization without abandoning traditional roles and customs. One of the assets of Hinduism has been its ability to incorporate seemingly unorthodox ideas, not fight against them. Contemporary Indian women today are trying to reconcile innovation with tradition as they assert that women are significant participants in the economy, that crimes against women should be investigated and prosecuted, and that a woman can divorce her husband. This is no easy task in light of the highly structured nature of Indian society. It is both hierarchical and patriarchal. Regardless of a family's economic position, women in the family are considered inferior. It is the woman's job, first and foremost, to be loyal to her husband and to be a good mother to her children.

Dharma's Daughters is divided into three sections. The first introduces us to women who live and work in Bombay, where the population is dense and the housing is inadequate. We meet manual laborers, members of construction crews, and illiterate domestic workers who live in shanties. Mitter paints a vivid picture of the harried lives of these women. In the second section Mitter describes Hindu mythology and the traditions that form the basis for women's lives. In the final section, Mitter tells of the increasing mobilization and resistance of Indian women since the 1970s.

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