

Dharma's DAUGHTERS

Sara S. Mitter

Sara S. Mitter, *Dharma's Daughters: Contemporary Indian Women and Hindu Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

Sara Mitter's book is a product of years of observation by a non-Indian of the lot of women in urban India. It portrays the complex life of Indian women who are circumscribed by a sense of duty and self-sacrifice. It contains stories that re-

present the drudgery of everyday lives of women, especially poor, working class women in India. Mitter stays around watching these women hoping for some explanation and some real life situation that will allow them to escape that life. Dharma's daughters leave a grim reminder of how much damage has been caused

to half the population because of man's inhumanity to women and the gross injustices of the economic and social system.

Mitter's writing gives an impression that a foreign visitor is trying to make sense of what Indians have taken for granted for years. The style of her writing and the compassion of her description, on the other hand, make you read the familiar with new insights. She goes to chawls and hutments in Bombay and spends considerable effort to see how these women play the game of "Darwinian survival."

She takes the lens of concern to the lives of women who seem to live up to the ideals of Sita (of Ramayana), full of single minded devotion and sacrifice. The section on finding parallels between the Hindu epic role of women and the lives of working class women will maintain your attention but there is nothing new here. The stories of women, anecdotes picked from newspapers, tales found in conversations are all full of insights in themselves. The author does not take them to heady social analysis, but then that is the strength of the book.

