

## Temple Dancer

**Amy Weintraub**

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*Temple Dancer*, Amy Weintraub's astonishing new novel, evokes the power of a lost spiritual tradition through the story of two disparate women: a disgraced temple dancer from 1930s India, and a contemporary social worker in Massachusetts.

Saraswati and Wendy meet by chance on a crowded train in India. Their serendipitous encounter initiates a spiritual calling for Wendy, who's depressed and defeated after an ugly divorce and rejection by her former guru. Although she's found freedom through yoga, she struggles to retain her faith in the Western world.

Saraswati, now in her eighties, was committed in childhood to be a dancer in a temple. The tradition, *devadasis*, degenerated into cheap sexuality, but Sarawati conveys deep power and peace through "a noble radiance in her face." She diagnoses Wendy's shame and offers her a gift that will change her life: a small red book that includes an account of *devadasis* and its significance as a practice. Through the translation, Wendy revives her own sensuality and holy bond through yogic practice.

Nimble as it bridges fifty years and thousands of miles for two very different women, *Temple Dancer* is gorgeous and ambitious. Its chapters alternate between India in 1947, the United States in 1997, and India in 1938. Both of the women are fleshed out with rich psychological descriptions that evoke the very different cultures they live in.

Saraswati's early ecstasy and freedom are in stark contrast to the miserable drudgery that Wendy feels in the "enlightened" West. Wendy, always hungry for spiritual food, finds nourishment in Indian traditions. Although she's a wealthy, white American, her dependence on these teachings is respectful, not appropriative. Her healing process is painful but necessary, and each small step forward is one in a delicate dance of self-exploration and trust.

*Temple Dancer* is an unforgettable novel about a woman's search for peace—and another's desire for justice.

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