



The Temple Dancer

John Speed

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India, 1657.

When Maya, a graceful, young temple dancer with a mysterious past, is sold into slavery, she enters a world of intrigue, violence, and forbidden love. Bought by a Portuguese trader and sold as a concubine to the dissolute vizier of Bijapur, she embarks on a treacherous journey.

In a caravan led by the dangerous settlement man Da Gama, she travels by elephant on the hostile road to Bijapur, joined by Geraldo, a Portuguese adventurer, and Pathan, a handsome prince who carries a dark secret. Together with Lucinda, a beautiful, spoiled young Goan heiress, and the manipulative eunuch Slipper, they climb the windswept mountain road through the Western Ghats.

When their caravan is attacked by bandits, the travelers' lives are turned upside down. In the aftermath, Maya and Lucinda suddenly find themselves stranded in a strange, exotic world, a world filled with passion, romance, and deception, pure love and lurking evil, where nothing is as it seems and the two women are faced with great temptation as well as heart-wrenching decisions that will affect the rest of their lives.

Greed, politics, commitment, courage, love, and intolerance mesh to form a vibrant Indian tapestry. With spectacular settings, unforgettable characters, fierce sensuality, and intense scholarship, this adventure-packed novel marks the debut of an exciting new storyteller.

The Temple Dancer is the first volume of John Speed's Indian trilogy, a three-book journey that will cover the final years of the Mogul Empire and the rise of the Marathis under the highwayman Shivaji. It will leave you breathlessly awaiting his next novel.

The Temple Dancer Details

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Author : John Speed

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From Reader Review The Temple Dancer for online ebook

Laxmi says

For being Speed's first novel, "The Temple Dancer" is an exquisitely planned and written, with a rich and constantly contouring story line placed in the backdrop of 1600s Moghul India. The characters are plentiful and beautifully developed, and the scenery and background are described to such an illustrious detail that it almost feels as though we are there in the rocking howdah perched atop the elephant. Despite the tumultuous nature of the plot, the story does chivy along at a rather slow pace, leading the reader to occasionally skim through the descriptive sections to get to the gist of the story.

Within the first few pages of the novel, we are introduced to the two beautiful, yet extremely different heroines of our story; Lucinda Desana, the blaringly naive and wealthy Portuguese heiress and Maya, the exotically stunning devadasi (temple dancer) who was recently purchased by Lucinda's family as a concubine/bribe for the vizier. They are thrown together for the journey from Goa to Bijapur, along with a caravan consisting of a wily Desana cousin whom death follows, a notoriously dangerous settlement man, the deviously cunning eunuch, and a mysteriously secretive prince. As various narrators chronicle the tale, Speed takes the time to develop the personalities of each character, allowing us to fit them better into their surroundings. As Maya and Lucinda navigate their way through dangerous bandit-laden mountain passes and roads, they are also forced to work their way around greed, religious differences, shifty political alliances, commitment, scandal, death as a means of escape, and most importantly, love.

Speed explores a number of themes throughout his novel whilst simultaneously weaving a vibrant story line that fits beautifully into the tapestry of Moghul India. Before I continue singing praises of the novel, I must point out that I was extremely annoyed by the constant usage of "Hindi" when referring to a "Hindu". As someone that claims to have studied Indian history for decades, Speed's blatant inaccuracy was surprising and unexpected; "Hindi" is the language, "Hindu" is a follower of Hinduism. It should also be noted that the story is narrated at a slow pace and occasionally feels as though it is lagging due to the heavy emphasis on detail, but we must take into account that Speed is a first time novelist, and furthermore he is trying to capture Moghul India as accurately as possible. Besides these minor setbacks, I thoroughly enjoyed the novel and look forward to reading the next of the trilogy, "Tiger Claws"

Sapna says

I really wanted to like this book as it was the first novel I had read that brought up the Portuguese history side of things in India. I have usually read about the time when the English were in India. Unfortunately, I found this book rather flat and predictable. There was no true element of surprise and reading it felt quite tedious.

Lynette Lark says

It has an Indiana Jones pace.

Tracey says

A really enjoyable read. I was up until the late night finishing this wonderful book, just had to get to the end.

The beginning moves along at a fast pace as we find ourselves drawn into the characters of the novel. I felt like I too was languishing on the howdah: the chatter of a thousand birds and the view of the dense overhanging trees so close I could touch them. India was in my soul.

Adventure was just around the corner - I could smell it.

So go the words flowing gracefully out before me. What exploration to be had, but by the middle of the book the pace turned somewhat slower. Was it plot development? Still moving, but more like a hot lazy summer day. I was hoping that maybe we could do without another scene on the wide platform swing as it flowed back and forth, but it was not to be.

Romance and intrigue were all around.

Unfortunately, one of the main character's personality changed midway through the book ; once being strong and courageous just seem to become weak and timid, did I miss the part where he became a eunuch, was it greed that drove him or just the author losing his way?

Would he redeem himself?

Nearing the end of the book, I was thinking about what new plots where to transpire between our characters, I hoped the journey would not stop, but for some reason part of the story just galloped in another direction. Oh to be yearning for more.

The book was filled with some passionate people and deadly sins around every corner... I could hear there late night whispers amongst the grove of trees.

An exciting read if you don't mind some of the characters losing their way slightly in believability. I can't wait to continue my visit to India and the distance past in his next book.

Ivana S. says

In my humble opinion.. :)...

This book was amazing. I think it's great choice for people who read for escapism, full of adventure, passion..., an exciting story wrapped in the magic of 17th-century-India..

Although, those who are not into India's culture might not like it that much, because it's really a book about India. It's my number one book, not because it's the best book ever written but because the way it made me feel, took me away, to destinations described inside, made me feel like I was there. Yes it started out slow but soon I was drawn into the story, into strong and interesting characters, and I enjoyed their own little stories and personal growth, and the way their paths intertwined, filled with conflicts, passion and desires, hurdles and personal challenges they had to overcome, fighting their own inner battles. But the atmosphere, and magically described places I felt like I actually visited really made my imagination bloom. Reading this book was truly a journey.

India lovers, I highly recommend :)

Ana Mardoll says

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"The Temple Dancer" is a fine first novel for a promising new author, although I am surprised by the description's reference to a "proposed trilogy", given the rather 'final' nature of the epilogue. Though not without its faults, the novel is an engaging read and is worth a look, particularly for fans of the genre.

To give credit to the author, the story is engaging and moves along nicely, with the exposition as fascinating and well written as the action. Speed has also finely captured his female characters, which can be a difficult feat for a male author writing about such easily stereotyped characters as the Exotic Temple Dancer and Spoiled Heiress. Yet Speed's women resist stereotyping and show great resilience and strength of character in the turmoil that faces them. The male characters are, mostly, also very well done, with the 'tired old soldier' stereotype fleshed out nicely here as the men grapple with their own lives and whether they are brave enough to risk or even discard their futures for the women they have come to love and admire.

Not all of the characters are so thoroughly fleshed out, though. Speed's "unlikely villain" seems to be almost impossibly evil and conniving - carefully disposing of every member of his family over the course of many years in order to place himself closer to his family's fortune. In addition to these carefully manipulated murders, he seems to take sadistic delight in the torments the women suffer on their journey, and while it may be said that evil does not need a reason to be evil, it would be a nice inclusion to understand what motivates this man to be so cruel. Speed also relies heavily on misunderstandings, poor communication, and just plain stupidity of characters to advance the plot, which I hope he will trim to a minimum for his next novel.

(Example: When an old, frail man who is openly taking arsenic as 'medicine' dies of arsenic overdose, it seems unreasonable for *everyone* in the camp to immediately assume it was murder. It is just as likely that he took too much medicine or that his age and frailty couldn't handle the strain, and at least a few people should have voiced doubts as to the certainty of murder.)

This book is labeled historical fiction and Speed certainly takes care with the details and much of the overlay here seems genuine. A secret, powerful cabal of eunuchs seems to stretch the imagination slightly, and it also seems a powerful coincidence that the dancer - Maya - is carrying the long-lost treasure that they lost so many years ago, and an even further coincidence that the eunuch chosen to escort her to her new life is the very same one who lost the treasure so long ago! Nor is this incredible string of coincidences ever adequately explained, but rather it is just left as one of those mystical convergences that just happen. Although it did not detract much from my enjoyment of this story, I hope that the next novel from this author relies a little less on coincidence to drive the plot. In fact, I think a little less coincidence and more of the mostly superb character development could result in a fine novel indeed.

~ Ana Mardoll

Holly Clarke says

This book annoyed me. It started out very slowly and then it started to get good about a third of the way through it so I stuck with it. But, then it became predictable but I was so far into it I didn't want to cast it

aside, so I finished it. The characters are fairly straightforward and simple. Not a very intense plot but since it took place in India during the 1600's, I finished the book so I could learn a little more about the country during that time.

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

I'd like to give this book 3.5 stars. Although it has a rich plot and well defined love stories, something just did not click for me. I enjoyed reading it, but I learned very little about India during this era, which is why I am not shelving it as historical fiction. I recommend it almost as chick lit.

Allen Reesor says

Great read. Waiting for another book

Historical, cultural accuracy are combined with good prose and a riveting plot. I am hopeful that another book will show up.

Kris says

This book was acceptably fun and interesting. I did keep wanting to return to it and see what would happen next. But it struggled in story flow, creating solutions or plot moments without having backed them up through the book. At times the writing felt amateurish. But it was an interesting look at India which I've not read about before and the dialogue and characters were more often than not compelling.

Alexis says

This was an AMAZING book! I was totally enchanted. Last week I read a book that touched on India. This past week I just had to get my hands on something better. I am so glad I chose this!

The story centers around two women—Maya and Lucinda, in 17th century India. Lucinda is the last female of a Portuguese family in Goa, India. Her family, in trying to save itself and its fortune, purchase Maya, a devadasi or temple dancer, to sell as a concubine to the highest bidder in far away Bijapur, India.

The saga begins with the two women, and the eunuch Slipper, thrown together in a journey across the sub-continent. They are placed in a palanquin and transported via elephant to the mountains. Their fates will now be forever twisted and changed.

Maya is someone who Lucinda would never ordinarily meet. Maya is a temple dancer—a Hindi slave who dances for the goddess. Lucinda is a pampered girl who is a slave in her own right—doing what her family needs of her.

Of course, there is intrigue and mystery.

Slipper is a mysterious eunuch who wants something from Maya, and will stop at nothing to get her and her possessions.

Da Gama is the Portuguese settlement man in charge of the trade and caravan—who trusts no one. He wants to quickly and safely complete the journey.

Da Gama's burak (a native settlement man) is Pathan, a who just might be a prince incognito.

And then there is Geraldo, Lucinda's cousin.

This odd assortment of characters face danger at every turn on their journey. Some of the action is more believable than others, but fascinating none the less. Bandits in the mountains, arsenic use and poisoning, forbidden love, lost children, murder, betrayal, elephants, harems, and waterfalls all pepper the story with swashbuckling adventure.

In closing, I will admit this—I found the ending is a bit, um, trite? By the end of the story I knew what I wanted to have happen—and it does not let down. But it did feel a bit rushed. Almost as if the author lost steam and wanted to get onto another project, another story.

Natasa says

The author does an excellent job in taking us to 17th century South India. As you read it, you want to read more and get drawn into it. You want to know what happens next. Combine the intrigue with some history, and that makes this book a very interesting read.

Ariela says

I never thought I would say this but John Speed now rivals Philippa Gregory as one of my favorite authors of historical fiction. Set in India in the year 1657, "The Temple Dancer" is a riveting tale of two women: Lucinda Desana, a beautiful Goan heiress; and Maya, a devadasi (temple dancer) who is bought by Lucinda's family and sold as a concubine. They meet in Goa and travel through the Western Ghats by elephant, each heading towards a fate that has changed by the time their journey has ended. Escorted by a dangerous man with a reputation for violence, a conniving eunuch, a cold-hearted businessman and a mysterious prince, their story is filled with intrigue, adventure, sensuality and forbidden love. Indeed, I lost many hours of sleep because I simply had to find out what Speed's exotic collection of characters were going to do next. His immense knowledge of Indian history and culture transforms them into vibrant people who inhabit an unforgettable world. The back cover of this book says that Speed has studied Indian history, art and religion for over thirty-years and I believe it. I can hardly wait for the next two books in this planned trilogy.

Michelle Stie says

I found the female characters compelling, but the plot just plodded along. The author does try to be literary/artistic, but oftentimes the prose is ponderous and can be irritating.

Richard says

Greed, politics, commitment, courage, love, and historical scholarship blend to form this vibrant Indian tapestry which is the author's excellent adventure-packed first novel. The ending was not as I predicted. But, then, I learned this was but the beginning of a planned trilogy. I shall certainly read the next tale.
