

# TEMPLE DANCER Book Club Questions

1. What was your favorite part of the novel?
2. What scenes troubled you?
3. Was Wendy a “good enough” mother? Do you think all mothers harbor feelings of not being “good enough”?
4. Do you think art and its creation (dance, writing, painting, etc) can be a portal into an altered state? Have you experienced that state of absorption where everything else seems to disappear?
5. Did Wendy show poor judgment? Have you faced similar crossroads in your life?
6. Was Saraswati’s adoption a cause for celebration or a curse?
7. Reviewer Jacquelyn Jackson says that *Temple Dancer* “demonstrates the ways in which eastern and western religion seek to define, control and contain female sexuality through the lives of two women who struggle through these mind-fields of control to name for themselves the sexual mystery and wonder of their bodies.” Do you agree, disagree, and why?
8. In Jalaya Bonheim’s 1997 classic, *Aphrodite’s Daughter: Women’s Sexual Stories and the Journey of the Soul*, she speaks in the introduction of her own call to study and then perform and teach sacred Indian temple dance. She discovered that “the temple dancers were priestesses whose sexual energy was held sacred, and that traditions similar to theirs had once existed in Japan, in Egypt, in Europe and throughout the Middle East... Like the shamans and healers of many cultures, they were go-betweens, messengers between heaven and earth—not prostitutes but priestesses.” Would you agree? What other traditions and cultures considered female sexuality sacred until they didn’t?
9. Most women in mid-twentieth-century India belonged to their fathers until they were virtually sold to their husbands through the dowry system. After the arranged marriage, the new wife, often still a young teen, was likely considered a servant in her mother-in-law’s home and the property of her husband. In this context, how would you view the power or powerlessness of the devadasis before 1947?
10. Do you believe that the ritual temple dance was the devadasi’s ecstatic union with the divine?

11. Do you believe that the plight of the devadasis after 1947 is an example of how male-dominated culture both craves and fears the power of female sexual freedom?
12. Here's another question that arises from Jacquelyn Jackson's review: How do we, as women, claim our own deep sense of sacred, of god, of spirit when voices outside of us shame female sexuality with labels like "slut" or "prostitute."
13. Are there lingering questions from the story that you are still pondering?
14. Who do you think should read this book?

