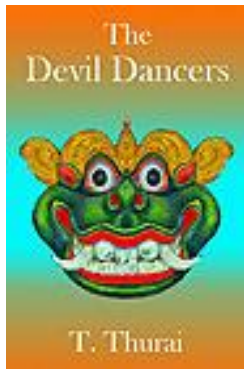


## The Devil Dancers



**Reviewed by:** David R Pickup

**Author:** T Thurai

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The story of Ceylon's emergence as an independent nation is less well known than its larger neighbours that form the Indian subcontinent. This book is set in the 1950s and covers post British rule and the resulting ethnic and political tensions. *The Devil Dancers* shows what a lawyer, who can write, can do with some imagination and legal training. It reads more like a Shakespearean tragedy.

It's part political thriller, part cultural study, and part love story as it deals with rising tensions between ethnic groups, individual stories of temptation, love and betrayal, and the political power struggle. Although the events are over 50 years ago, they are just as relevant now.

The book is set in the period of independence in February 1948 and the time of one of the first prime ministers - S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. He was a self-appointed 'defender of the besieged Sinhalese culture' and introduced the controversial Sinhala Only Act, recognising Sinhala as the sole official language of the government.

The legislation posed a grave concern for the Tamil community, which perceived their language and culture were threatened. There was considerable friction between the leaders of the Tamils and Sinhalese. Bandaranaike was assassinated in 1959.

It will appeal to anyone who enjoys *A Passage to India* or *The Raj Quartet*. But unlike them it is not about the British in India or about the British sense of class, as no British characters appear in the book. It is written entirely from the local standpoint.

The book also contains deities or spirits that become active characters in the story. This is alien to most of us. The way gods and idols come to life and mischievously interfere in human events is not something that we are familiar with. The gods and deities seem to mirror, if not cause, the jealousies and antagonisms the human characters have.

The author, T Thurai, studied as a historian before working as a journalist for 10 years. She then re-trained as a lawyer and worked in a number of large London firms. She worked in non-contentious commercial law but describes finding her niche when she became a professional support lawyer. In that role she developed her writing and research skills, which was crucial to unearth the political story behind this book. Her legal training is obvious in the research and the drama gleaned from contemporary sources.

This enjoyable work brings a neglected period alive. I look forward to her next books.

**David Pickup** *is a partner in Aylesbury based Pickup & Scott*



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