



RELIGION 12
Major World Religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism
Summer Reading
Deep River

by
Shusaku Endo
Translated by Van C. Gessel. New York: New Directions, 1994.

Deep River provides a colorful portrait of India – its geography, history and climate, and modern religious and political atmosphere – from an outsider’s perspective. Primarily, though, Deep River is the story of a group of Japanese tourists on a pilgrimage to Buddhist holy sites in India. While none of the tourists we meet is particularly or conventionally religious, they each face fundamental, “religious” questions that cause the reader to ask those very same questions: Who am I? What am I looking for? Where am I going? What is life about?

In Deep River we meet the following characters:

- Isobe* – a businessman who has recently lost his wife to cancer
- Enami* – a tour guide with a passion for Indian culture
- Mitsuko* – a skeptic who identifies with French literature but cannot give herself over to real feelings and emotions
- Otsu* – a social outcast who sticks to Catholicism but chooses to live an anomalous religious life
- Numada* – a writer of children’s stories with a love for animals
- Kiguchi* – an aging war veteran tortured by his past

Together, the characters we meet create a microcosm, a small cross-section of society that represents multiple approaches to religion and religious traditions. As you read the novel, take note of what motivates each of these characters to make a pilgrimage to India – what are they looking for? what do they find? what images comfort or challenge them?

Your assignment for the summer is to...

- *first*, **read the novel**. Make note of passages that are particularly important or interesting. Most importantly, enjoy it! It’s a beautifully crafted and provocative novel.
- *second*, **choose one of the main characters** (one of those listed above) and think about her/his perspective in it. Why did s/he undertake this journey and what is s/he looking for in India? Does s/he find it? What particular experiences or epiphanies does s/he have and what does s/he learn from them? How does s/he connect with or relate to other characters? At the end of the story, is s/he changed?
- *third*, **write a short reflection paper** about the novel, due on the first day of class. This will consist of three parts:
 - **Summary** – Describe the character you’ve chosen to think about (basically, provide an answer to the questions above).
 - **Analysis** – What is Endo (the author) trying to say about life, religion, God, etc., through this character? In short, what’s the point? Use specific references to the text.
 - **Reflection** – Do you like this character? Do you relate to her/him in any way? Do you agree with what Endo is saying through her/him? How did the book and this character challenge the way you think about religion, about God, etc.? The paper should be carefully edited and must follow these guidelines: **typed, double-spaced, normal margins, no larger than 12pt font, at least one full page, no longer than two full pages (one full page=25 lines)**. The heading should only include your full name and “Summer Reading Reflection Paper.” No date or other title is necessary.