

**Eastern Philosophy of Consciousness and Humanity**  
**EPOCH Colloquium by**  
**Professor Purushottama Bilimoria**  
**Friday - April 4, 2014 at 2:00PM**  
**Sakamaki Hall C-308**

**Dharma and Grief:**  
**Imagination in Classical Indian Moral**  
**Metaphysics of Suffering**

The seminar begins with exploring recent thinking on the 'hard emotions', such as grief and mourning, in the context of classical Indian ethics or Dharma. Taking a comparative perspective, we will discuss how the tragic pathos features in classical literature, and in Rabindranath Tagore's sketches (and via a film-song). The work of empathy or compassion in a therapeutic setting will also be drawn upon. These instances will help to illustrate the spaces of imagination at personal and inter-personal levels that are continuous with the *dharmic* quest in dire moments of suffering.

The second part will focus on metaphysical thinking. We will draw on the use of *mantra*-s in ancient sacrifice toward evoking divinity in the form of *devatā*-s or deities, but without committing to their real or ontological existence. In other words, gods have momentary existence. It will be suggested that the Mīmāṃsā thinkers here are evolving a theory of *Absent Divinity* – akin to Heidegger's 'Absent God', or Jasper's 'Missing God'. Here imagination forestalls the counter-argument that the residual potency from the smoky sacrifice would not work should we not assume the real-time existence of deities.

Finally, a comparison will be made between Yudhisthira as the paragon of morality in the Mahābhārata and Mahatma Gandhi. The former bore witness to the carnage of the war as it drew to an unending end, and faced rebuke from Draupadī for wandering the earth without finding an absolute foundation for *Dharma*. Gandhi's theory of morality called for scant theorizing and much sensitivity toward social variations and alterations, and reliance on sheer inner moral strength, checked by conscience. Thus he appealed to situational imagination; as he remarked, truth in moral matters has no absolutes; rather, the individual by virtue of her character and imaginative engagement arrives at a decision and resolves to act accordingly. One chooses the best course to the best cause. When applied to war and its anti-thesis nonviolence, this imaginative moral insight has had a positively transformative effect on world politics in our secular and postcolonial age.



**Professor Purushottama Bilimoria**

has taught and has held many professorships at various institutions such as Deakin University (Melbourne), University of Melbourne (Australia), Oxford University (All Souls College and Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies), Harvard, and Columbia Universities.

He is presently a visiting professor-cum-lecturer at University of California, Berkeley where he teaches in the Religious Studies and African American Studies departments. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *Sophia*, Springer Journal in Philosophy & Traditions, and of the new *International Journal of Dharma Studies* (Springer). He is best known for his work on Testimony (*Śabdapramāṇa*) in Indian Philosophy, Indian Ethics and Justice, Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya metaphysics and epistemology.

**Everyone is welcome to attend.**

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