



Asian Studies Centre  
St Antony's College, University of Oxford  
*South Asia Seminar, Week 8*



## ***The Unmaking of an Imperial Army: The Indian Army in World War II***



**Tarak Barkawi**

Reader in International Relations,  
London School of Economics

Tuesday March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2 p.m.  
Pavilion Room,  
St Antony's College

The shock of repeated defeats, massive expansion, and the pressures of operations on multiple fronts transformed the Indian Army in World War II. It had to commission ever greater numbers of Indians as officers. Recruitment of other ranks reached beyond the favoured Martial Races. In the field, officers bent and then broke the rigid ethnic rules around which the army was organized, in small and large ways. The right rations, the right type of recruit, the officer knowledgeable in specific languages or religions, were not always available. Nonetheless, the army managed to recover, reform, and go on to victory. Colonial knowledge and the official Orientalism so evident in the ethnic structuring of the army was less relevant to managing the army at war. In large measure, Indian soldiers fought the Japanese led by a combination of emergency-commissioned nationalists (the new Indian officers) and British officers who were new to India and did not speak their soldiers' language. The reasons why the Indian Army fought effectively for their colonial rulers were not to be found in stereotypes of Martial Races or South Asian warrior values.

**Tarak Barkawi** is Reader in the Department of International Relations, London School of Economics. He earned his doctorate at the University of Minnesota and specialises in the study of war, armed forces and society with a focus on conflict between the West and the global South. He is author of *Globalization and War, Soldiers of Empire*, and many scholarly articles.

**All are welcome**

Convenor: Dr Faisal Devji

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*This seminar series is organised with the support of the History Faculty.*

*Picture: Indian infantrymen of the 7th Rajput Regiment about to go on patrol on the Arakan front in Burma, 1944.*