



Asian Studies Centre  
St Antony's College  
University of Oxford  
*South Asia Seminar, Week 5*



## *Eastminster: Decolonisation and State-Building in British Asia*



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Tuesday November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2 p.m.  
Fellows' Dining Room,  
St Antony's College

This talk broadly examines the concept of Eastminster in the eventful context of Asian decolonisation and need for rapid constitutional settlement. It explores key deviations that Eastminster possesses from the “Settler variety” of Westminster. This constitution-making period and the adoption of Eastminster had far-reaching consequences for all of Asia.

While the British Westminster system was more commonly associated with the settler countries, all of the Asian states that emerged from British control took key elements of this system. Indeed, the British and the Asian indigenous elites saw advantages in applying this very British system to the very different context of the East. However, these Asian nations did not have centuries to interpret and adjust in order to develop their constitution – as the British had. Instead, they needed to formulate and design a constitution within months and therefore invariably drew upon the system of their imperial master. Since the Westminster system is based on convention and ambiguity and not rigid rules and clarity, it could be adopted and manipulated to produce diverse results and reactions that would shape their countries forever. These states therefore became Eastminsters, with clear institutional and political resemblances to the British system but also cultural and constitutional divergences from Westminster.

**Harshan Kumarasingham** is a political historian of British Decolonisation and the subsequent state-building that followed. He is Researcher at the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History in Frankfurt and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. Prior to this he was Smuts Fellow in Commonwealth Studies at the University of Cambridge. Harshan's latest book is *Constitution-Making in Asia - Decolonisation and State-Building in the Aftermath of the British Empire* from which his talk derives and he recently edited for Cambridge University Press *Constitution Maker - Selected Writings of Sir Ivor Jennings*. He is presently working on a monograph that will examine the Crown and its legacy in South Asia.

**All are welcome**

Convenor: Dr Faisal Devji

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*This seminar series is organised with the support of the History Faculty. Picture: The Indian Parliament building (designed by Edwin Lutyens) in 1944.*