



**Die Welt in Weltkriegen -  
Erfahrungen, Wahrnehmungen und  
Perspektiven aus Afrika und Asien**  
Eine Veranstaltungsreihe des Zentrums Moderner Orient

**Thursday, 24th June 2010, 6 pm**

**Rethinking (the Absence of) Fascism  
in India, c. 1922-1945**

**Lecture by Dr. Benjamin Zachariah**

Although there is much anecdotal and autobiographical evidence indicative of the influence of fascism, generically and therefore with a small 'f', on some circles in India, this has never been systematically studied. Benjamin Zachariah suggests that ideas that are usually associated with fascism were far more widespread in India than has been previously assumed.

The scholarly literature on fascism and on India do not, at present, speak to each other. This is an attempt to begin this dialogue. There are two aspects to the talk, therefore. The first is to attempt to delineate the use of the term 'fascism' so that it can serve as an analytical category rather than merely as a term of political abuse (while acknowledging that the latter aspect cannot desirably be dispensed with). This is in part a problem of retrospectivism: fascism is, today, a word that has a very strong normative significance, ironically dominated not by the movement that provided its name to the generic phenomenon, but instead by visions of Nazi Germany, and moreover, visions that were in large part constructed after 1945. The call for a definition of fascism and therefore a reading of fascism that partakes of the post-1945 normative significance of the term is impossible to avoid. In some ways, therefore, the problem is one that is not particular to the historiography of India: Fascism (with a capital F) was read in 1922 quite differently from generic fascism during the Spanish Civil War, or in Germany in 1933 or 1945. In part, this is also a problem of terminology: not all fascist movements, inconveniently for historians, called themselves 'Fascist'.

The second aspect is to attempt an understanding of the influence of fascism in India in its heyday. Was there a serious fascist presence in India in the 1920s and '30s? Were Indians seriously engaged with questions of fascism between the wars? How mainstream were views of, for instance, national belonging as related to race (Aryanness), of the nation as a body, of the use of eugenics and norms of physical fitness? How many of these ideas are now, retrospectively, seen specifically in terms of Nazism, whereas they were very much part of the Zeitgeist? This is also, therefore, an exercise in disaggregation: a number of the elements now associated with fascism in one way or another – militarism, national discipline and mass mobilisation, eugenics, Aryanism, the excitement of 'modernity' – have longer histories that cannot be subsumed merely within a history of 'fascism'. At the same time, there were those who consciously and vocally supported fascist regimes in Europe and saw aspects of fascism as worth emulating in India, with necessary changes (a religiously-tinged rather than a secular ideology here, a replacement of Jews with Muslims there).

**Dr Benjamin Zachariah** is Reader in South Asian History at the University of Sheffield, and currently a fellow at the ZMO, Berlin. He is the author of books on the developmental imagination in India in the first half of the twentieth century, on Jawaharlal Nehru, and on the exclusions and ambiguities of nationalism in India. His current project is concerned with the movement of ideas in the twentieth century, and is focused on the lives and activities of Indian exiles in Central Europe during the interwar years.

**Ort:**  
**Zentrum Moderner Orient**  
Konferenzsaal  
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin-Nikolassee

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung