

India: At Launch of New Book, Christophe Jaffrelot Talks Moditva, Undermining the Rule of Law and Gujarat

Thursday 28 March 2024, by [PANDYA Parth](#) (Date first published: 6 March 2024).

As per the political scientist, Narendra Modi himself is the “fourth pillar of the Gujarat model” as he continued the “populist style of direct communications” after becoming prime minister.

London: “Gujarat was the laboratory of today’s India; everything we see today in India was there in Gujarat, under the leadership of Narendra Modi,” said Christophe Jaffrelot at the London School of Economics during the launch of his latest book, [Gujarat Under Modi](#).

The book, published by C. Hurst, not only explains “the rise of Modi in Gujarat and the ways and means he used to retain power for so long”, but chronicles how Modi has scaled up the same formula in India since becoming prime minister in 2014.

Based on the careful collation of data, interviews with victims, policemen, businesses and politicians, and material from key archives over two decades, it covers the many aspects of the rise of Gujarat under Modi.

It makes sense of the ongoing polarisation technique used by Modi across India, the impact it has on communities – especially minorities – and other implications, economic and social, of such a technique, which is part of what is often touted as the foremost model of development.

Weeks before the next general election, one can only underscore the much-awaited anticipation around such an important body of work – the organisers of the book launch had to change the venue twice and yet there was not an inch of space left to accommodate more people in the biggest space available at LSE.

The pivotal role of publishing houses in commissioning and supporting the interpretation of shifting realities cannot be overstated.

Jaffrelot’s initial manuscript, poised for release in 2013, ahead of the 2014 general election, was held back due to necessary revisions. A decade later, revisiting the manuscript under the auspices of [Hurst Publication](#) allowed for deeper contemplation, unravelling myriad transformations.

The publication house has become instrumental in publishing a range of interesting and timely books in a mammoth year of elections across the democratic world.

Four pillars of Narendra Modi’s ‘Gujarat Model’

Jaffrelot calls for urgent attention to the ‘Gujarat Model’ that relied on four pillars: “communal polarisation resulting in Hindu majoritarianism; the politicisation of state institutions, including the

police and the judiciary; a political economy implying crony capitalism and growing inequalities and populist techniques of communication”.

He passionately argues in the book that the divisive polarisation technique was developed in Gujarat, which was later used nationally – changing the length and breadth of the values India ever stood for.

“Communal riot was a recipe for the electoral success of the BJP, and that was demonstrated in the 2002 elections, when the BJP won those seats where riots occurred”, he concludes based on his research on different constituencies in the state.

“My research shows that the communal polarisation technique has helped Modi sustain the power in 2002,” he says.

“But importantly, it is noteworthy that the polarisation went beyond the pogrom. Between 2003 and 2006, the BJP continued to polarise the politics of fear under the aegis of fake encounters, which today seems to be a norm in New India”.

But how did the ‘deinstitutionalisation of the rule of law’ play out?

“It started with the police; the promotion of Mr [D.G.] Vanzara and many other officers fits into the transformation of the police into the instrument of political agenda. Similar occurrences are visible in today’s India, where the rule of law was undermined and the rule of vigilantism was highlighted”.

‘Institutional ramifications’ under Modi as CM and PM

Commenting on the important role the book plays through its “comprehensive approach and meticulous details”, Sheba Tejani, a lecturer in international development at King’s College London, said that the book “turns into our attention to various dimensions of Modi’s rule in Gujarat, from the political, institutional, social and economic aspects.”

She continued: “It documents not only the major events, trends and transformations in Gujarat from the 2000s, but as importantly analyses techniques, discourses and politics that capitalised the shifts.”

“The book further illuminates the interlinkages between various moralities of the BJP’s rule to cast light on the tapestry of Hindu nationalism that has been grown in Gujarat.”

Recapitulating the three important lessons based on the book, Pavithra Suryanarayan, assistant professor in the department of government at LSE, said that this is not only the story of the rise of Modi but the “institutional consequences of the rise of Modi”.

She argues that the book discusses “how Modi managed all of this between the economic and electoral bases of support, both developing a specific form of capitalism and a specific language of populism.”

Importantly, Suryanarayan positions the book in a different category. She highlighted that very little has been written on “the institutional ramifications of the kind of rule Modi brought in Gujarat as a CM and now as PM” and in her opinion, this book has successfully examined this.

‘Model of surveillance’

Jaffrelot briefly discussed the role of surveillance while talking about the role of vigilantism.

He said, “The kind of surveillance we see today in India was invented in Gujarat 20 years ago.”

In this book, the author inquires into the “association between the Modi government and rising stars of Indian capitalism”. He also talked about the ‘Vibrant Gujarat summit’ and said, “It promoted the big companies at the expense of MSMEs [micro, small and medium enterprises], entrepreneurship and co-operatives. This particular economy is making the society of Gujarat more unequal”.

“Human development such as health and education were not in the priority list of the Modi government, the priority was to build infrastructure which they projected as a development model in the 2014 elections,” he added.

As per Jaffrelot, Modi himself is the “fourth pillar of the Gujarat model” as he continued the “populist style of direct communications” after becoming PM.

Jaffrelot talked about how Gujarat served as the laboratory of Modi’s India, not only in terms of “Hindu majoritarianism but also of caste and class politics”.

“[For the] First time in the history of India, a model of governance invented at the state level can be scaled up to the national dimensions,” Jaffrelot argues, pointing to the serious consequences this might have on the social and democratic fabric of India.

Parth Pandya is a journalist and writer based in London. Currently an MA candidate at the University of Westminster, he has been associated with organisations like BBC Gujarati. He tweets [@parthppandya](https://twitter.com/parthppandya).

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

The Wire

<https://thewire.in/communalism/in-launch-of-new-book-christophe-jaffrelot-talks-moditva-undermining-the-rule-of-law-and-gujarat>