# Advance Praise

Using the Dholera 'Smart City' as a microcosm, Rakib Akhtar's superb book provides an up-close look at the confluence of neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. This book is a must-read for students of politics and development in India, and all those interested in the political economy of ethnonationalist regimes.

**Michael Levein,** Johns Hopkins University

Rooted in Dholera this book sharply brings out the intimate self-sustaining relationship between Hindutva and neoliberalism. By showing us how the 'actually existing state' functions, we come to understand afresh, as an interlocutor from Dholera notes, the illusory power of development. An important new addition to the literature on the state and urbanisation in India.

**Nayanika Mathur,** University of Oxford

India is a key reference point for scholars seeking to understand the frictions and contrasts between Global North and Global South state, industry and civil society practices. Akhtar's book represents a major contribution, identifying contradictions in the enactment of smart city policy as a key manifestation of Hindu nationalist neoliberal development strategies in India.

**Nicholas Phelps,** The University of Melbourne

Smart city projects present alluring images of technological futures that overcome the resource limitations of our current ways of living. This book focuses on this form of development as it has played out in India, taking a pragmatic view on both promise and the politics of smart cities. The research and analysis show how contemporary capitalism and religious nationalism have been drawn together to create unique forms of urban promise: a record of a historic moment and a compelling analysis of how infrastructure can be used to shape the realm of the political.

**Edward Simpson,** Lancaster University

# Neoliberalism and Hindutva in the Making of an Indian Smart City

This book studies the intersection of neoliberalism and right-wing Hindu nationalism through smart city projects which are often advertised as solutions for sustainable development. Globally, the rise of right-wing nationalism has progressively shaped urbanization projects, also furthering political agendas. The book demonstrates how state institutions both are influenced by and contribute to the intricate linkages between these two ideologies at various levels of government. It shows how neoliberalism and Hindutva support each other, strengthening both ideologies within the state and society.

The book highlights the disagreements between the ideologies' foundational principles and their practical applications, showcasing the strategic manoeuvres that help these ideologies gain traction within political and governmental institutions. By investigating these dynamics, the book offers understandings into the intricacies of modern governance shaped by neoliberalism and nationalism.

**Rakib Akhtar** is Lecturer in Urban Planning at the University of Birmingham.

# Neoliberalism and Hindutva in the Making of an Indian Smart City

**Rakib Akhtar**

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# Acknowledgements

This book is part of my PhD project that I completed at the University of Oxford. Hence, there are many persons and institutions to thank, many more than I could list here. The financial and institutional support came from the Oxford Department of International Development. Somerville College's grants were of immense help. If there is one person who made this research possible, it must be Prof. Nikita Sud. From the day I wrote to her with a research proposal for a possible PhD, she stood behind me at every stage. She had the patience to read every word of my drafts and provide feedback in a manner equally insightful and inspiring. Her support and constructive criticism pushed me to think beyond the obvious with the 'so what' question lurking in the background, creating the foundation of the research. For someone with a disadvantaged background such as mine, it would not have been possible without her. The research gave me a great friend in Sudheesh who had the patience to bear me in the same house, read my drafts and provide considered and thoughtful feedback while giving me a clear map on how to improve those.

From the fieldwork in Gujarat, there is a never-ending list of people without whose help the project would be unthinkable. Sagar Rabari, the farmer leader with his endless energy to work for a better society, opened the field to me. In Dholera, the learned Pradyumansinh, a man of great wisdom, helped through long interviews along with access to every document regarding the project. In Ahmedabad, Prof. Navdeep Mathur was always there for support, taking me out for lunch despite his busy schedule. Leader of Opposition Paresh Dhanani, Jignesh Mevani and Lalji Desai all spent time helping with my research along with the assurance of my safety. I am forced to hide a number of names to ensure anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the research who helped me gain access to politicians, high-level bureaucrats or private consultants.

My dear parents (Maa and Abba), despite their financial constraints, never stopped dreaming of the best education for their two sons. Maa's hardship to raise us took an emotional as well as physical toll on her. Abba's 'never back down' approach

when it came to education despite earning a paltry sum as a laboratory technician went a long way for me to undertake a DPhil, the result of which is the book. However, I believe they too would have stopped dreaming if there was no state-subsidised/free higher education. I will always support free education (and a socialist state too) for the opportunities that can change the lives of the underprivileged while giving equal chances to everyone. Both my parents wanted their children to become 'doctors'. I ended up in an engineering college to study architecture whereas the elder son went on to study mathematics and computing. Getting a DPhil was the only way I could be a 'doctor'—even if I could not prescribe medicines, the way they would have liked! My elder brother happens to be my closest friend who supported my emotional and financial misadventures without ever raising a question. Knowing that he was always behind me, I continued with those misadventures. My sister-in-law is more like a sister, always supporting the family and me. The two kids, Saaim and Myna, completed the family.

Another way I have tried addressing my failure to become a doctor was by convincing Dr Samira (who can prescribe medicines) to become part of the family. She has been a constant support and source of motivation, exemplary in her great level of patience since I met her in the first year of the PhD. Her actions are impossible to reciprocate. Pradyumansinh, one of my main interviewees during fieldwork, would often make fun of me, pointing out three events which seemed near impossible: (*a*) construction of the Dholera smart city, (*b*) completion of my DPhil, and (*c*) my marriage. Whereas I still never want (*a*) to be realised unless it helps local farmers, I tied the latter two together, and Samira agreed to go off to a wedding venue the moment I completed the project!

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AES | actually existing state |
| ABVP | Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad |
| BBS | Bhal Bachao Samiti |
| BJP | Bharatiya Janata Party |
| BJS | Bharatiya Jana Sangh |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| DDIS | Dholera Developers and Investors Summit |
| DICDL | Dholera Industrial City Development Limited |
| DMIC | Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor |
| DP—TPS | Development Plan—Town Planning Schemes |
| DSIRDA | Dholera Special Investment Region Development Authority |
| DSP | Deputy Superintendent of Police |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| GDIPL | Greater Dholera Infracon Private Limited |
| GDP | gross domestic product |
| GIDB | Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board |
| GIDC | Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation |
| GIFT | Gujarat International Finance Tec-City |
| GTPUDA | Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act |
| HVM | Hotel Vision Modi |
| IAS | Indian Administrative Service |
| ICT | information and communications technology |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INC | Indian National Congress Party |
| INR | Indian Rupee |
| KHAM | Kshatriya–Harijan–Adivasi–Muslim |
| L&T | Larsen & Toubro |
| MNC | multinational corporation |

| MoU | memorandum of understanding |
| OBC | Other Backward Classes |
| PPP | public–private partnership |
| RSS | Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh |
| SC | Scheduled Castes |
| SP | Superintendent of Police |
| ST | Scheduled Tribes |
| SEZ | special economic zone |
| SIR | Special Investment Region |
| SPV | special purpose vehicle |
| USE | Universal Success Enterprise |
| VGGS | Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit |
| VHP | Vishwa Hindu Parishad |