

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT, professor, South Asian politics and history, Sciences Po (Paris)

'India needs more teachers'

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Apart from being a professor of South Asian politics and history at Sciences Po, Christophe Jaffrelot is a French political scientist and research director at French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). He is also an Overseas Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was Director of CERI (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales) at Sciences Po, between 2000 and 2008. In Mumbai to deliver a talk on analysing the political and military links between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, he speaks to HT Education on study of Indian politics, the importance of social research and career options for students in pure research.

How did you get interested in Indian politics?

I was initiated into Indian studies by my philosophy professor when I was 18. This woman was well versed in the spiritual dimensions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. I then started by studying the 13th century socio-religious reform movements. I was very interested in the movements resulting from India's encounter with the West, including Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj.

You teach South Asian politics and history at Sciences Po (Paris). Do you think there's a difference in the way politics and history are taught in India and at Sciences Po? What are the major differences in curricula?

There is no difference between the curriculum I follow at Sciences Po and those my colleagues follow at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University (DU) or Ashoka University. Social sciences — like hard sciences — have a universal quality; if history is not taught the same way in France and India, there is a problem — it may reflect political pressures, or self-censorship.

You were director of CERI at Sciences Po between 2000 and 2008. If we particularly talk about social sciences, in India, we hardly see students getting into social research. Why would you say it



is important for more students to take interest in the study of socio-political situations in the world?

Social sciences are key in different ways. In an open society, it is most useful to build citizens, the building blocks of democracies. Among other things, this is necessary to train good journalists. Secondly, a vibrant economy needs more than engineers and managers — to take care of human resources management, for instance. Indian businessmen are paying attention to liberal arts for all these reasons — look at the remarkable achievements of Azim Premji University, Ashoka University and Ahmedabad University.

Do you think it is important to include a component of research in all streams of education in the undergraduate level, so as to promote the culture of research in students eventually in their careers?

The sooner the better. In certain schools like Mahatma Gandhi International School, girls and boys are initiated into research work at a very young age. Research gives you a sense of initiative and a critical mind, something you need whatever the career you want to embrace. Besides, for a uni-

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versity, to promote research — and invite teachers, even those who focus on the undergraduate level — is the only way to be up-to-date. Otherwise, you teach subjects that are obsolete or with old fashioned methods.

What are the career options if a student opts to get into pure research - especially socio-political research?

There are many possibilities. First, India needs more teachers and more universities like the ones I've already mentioned. Second, data is a huge problem too; social scientists are needed for surveys that would supplement or even replace the existing ones. Third, NGOs can also hire social scientists, be they involved in the fields of education, human rights, civic liberties, etc. Their number is diminishing, but they will not disappear totally.