

THESIS

Construction of National Heroes in the Independent India
The Politics of Nation-building of the *Bharatiya Janata Party*
1998-2004

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Setting the problem

The basic inquiry of our study is the representational aspirations of the political power that wish to strengthen the feeling of national unity built on the social representation of the national hero. We would like to draw the attention to the complex political, social and cultural phenomenon that has taken central role since the nation-building processes of the 18th century but whose role in the relationships between the powers is less significant. Because of its relatively hidden nature we can say that hero-creation in order to legitimize power is manipulative and artificial. The political players of all times want the community of citizens to see and feel the objects (statues, monuments, museums) and people (heroes, martyrs, victims) that symbolize national unity in order to provide them with values.

Applied methods

We took the position and social acceptance of the newspapers into consideration while choosing the selection of sources as only the national media echoes can reflect properly on the discussions around a certain political agenda. After this, in the methodology chapter we dealt with the history and the social-political role of the hero and the national hero definitions. Through the development scientific analysis of the definition-history and the concept we present the applied analytical methods during which we can chart the authority's legitimizing aspirations. The scaling of the Indian specifics is an important part of this chapter in respect of the logic of the study but we have to mention that the hero-creation of India is not all different from the European models. This is because the Indian political elite absorb European ideas (liberalism, socialism, nationalism, passive resistance etc.) and different methods of constructing the process of becoming a nation already from the 19th century.

The results of the research 1

Methodological and definitional frames

Based on the consent of the literature read by the author developmental and cultural nationalism seem to be suitable for defining the specifics (especially for describing the political attitudes of the *Bhartiya Janata Party* and the *Sangh Parivar Party*.) These terms bring us closer not only to the understanding of the rise of the Hindu nationalism but also to the receiving of the

political, economic and social change of this nationalism from 1947 till today. The total definitions that have been created by nationalism research (for example, the Indian nationalism is colonizing/nationalist opposition) are considered enough to generally understand the process of building the nation, however, they are too simplistic to examine the topic in a more sophisticated way. The goal of the thesis was not testing the already existing theories but more likely to create a definitional frame (not total) that helps revealing the nation builder and symbolic policy of the Hindu nationalists. This is why we do not find closing the Hindu nationalism into a hermetically sealed opposition effective, because the models that are similar to this can only serve to distinguish between the essentialist and the discussable Indian nationalisms. We treat the Hindu nationalism first of all a cultural (religious) nationalism but the complexity of the events examined by the author go well beyond this category. According to our definition the Hindu nationalism is a representational nationalism that wants to unite the nation through the fetishism of the national and religious symbols, while it leads discussions beyond the secular methods with the aggressive Hindu nationalist organisations. With the conceptualization of the representational nationalism we have a chance to interpret the so far less processed nation-building efforts of the Hindu nationalism like the depoliticized and campaign oriented organizing of the Hindu religious holidays (*Ratha Yatra*, *Kar Seva*) or the process of how the cult figures of Hindu nationalism (Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Deendayal Upadhyaya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak) are turning into national heroes.

The results of the research 2

The construction of heroes of the Hindu nationalists: the expropriation of the historical inheritance of Sardar Patel

While we were examining the historical role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel we could see that as the Minister of Interior he had to handle extremely complex problems with regards to the diplomatic meetings concerning the secession of the British Crown or the building and reconsideration of the country's administrative system. Due to his methods and his solutions he often had conflicts with Nehru but his loyalty to Ghandi kept him in the government till the end of his life. According to Ghandi India needed both Nehru and Patel to create and keep the independence of the country. The significance of Vallabhbhai Patel's political inheritance and the nursing of his historical figure is still visible in India. A number of hospitals, schools and governmental institutions have his name.

He belongs to the few figures of Indian nation-building who were capable of creating the unity of the nation with their presence in the past and with their remembrance in the present. He

received the name “sardar” while he was still alive but he was called several other names. Patel was India's “Ironman”, “Bismarck” and “Lion of Bardol”. In the process of the building of the nation Patel had a less spectacular but in a technical sense central role. Our short and in many point of view deficient study (for example we did not mention the constitutional work of Patel) would like to present that next to the Nehru-Ghandi axis we can find Sardar Patel as well in the substantial questions that concerned the whole India who made governmental decisions in a determined fashion sometimes without compromises. Therefore, we rather have to talk about Congress triumvirate when we consider the gaining of the independence of India because Patel's work can be observed in the fight against the British and in the construction of the national unity.

The scientific, political and public discussions about Sardar Patel mainly concern Patel's pro-hinduism, anti-muslim attitude and his sympathy towards Hindu nationalism. Based on the literature we can assert that the sources do not support any of these theories. Well known historians and social scientists like Rafiq Zakaria or Ravindra Kumar argue in favour of his pragmatic and objective judgement. Despite this we could see in the previous chapters that the nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* that defend the Hindu interests started the social and political implementation of their own Patel construction.

- (1) The march that was started by Narendra Modi as the prime minister of Gujarat in 2002 wanted to get its legitimacy with the politicization of Patel's memory when Modi called himself the heir of Patel or to be more precise the incarnation of Patel.
- (2) L.K. Advani also adapted Patel's popularity and historical deeds in his efforts to legitimize the building of the Ram church in Ayodhya that led to a religious turmoil in 1992 claiming thousands of lives.
- (3) The Advani and generally speaking the BJP government that was in power between 1998 and 2004 had it as a discourse strategy to correct the historical acts of Patel, in other words they wanted to revise the ideological and propagandistic distortions of the Congress Party. The contemporary literature and the scientific approach that were published in the press treated the hero creation of the BJP Party unhistorical and disbelieving.

We did not only observe Sardar Patel's role in the collective remembrance with regards to the BJP's remembrance policy but also through those governmental or civil initiatives that treat propagating Patel's principles as their main goal. The two organisations that we present (*Sardar*

Vallabhbhai Patel and Veer Vithalbai Patel Memorial, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Memorial Fund) exemplify the efforts to keep Patel's memory in an institutionalised way and despite the judgement of Patel's personality has created a political echo they were trying to keep to the civil sphere and avoid the danger of over politicization. They see and want to make the people who want to take part in their programmes see Patel's person as the unifier and the creator of India's integrity. The existence, definition or functioning of neither of these institutions generated a serious debate mainly because the discourse on Patel is about which party wants to own or use his political inheritance and not about his political decisions that are branded as anti-Muslim and discriminative.

In order to unravel his controversial heritage (or at least to put it on a new level) a state funded memorial would be necessary where the Congress Party declares its recognition and pride for Patel's deeds. This, however, seems unlikely as this would necessarily overshadow the present great figures of the Congress, like Ghandi and Nehru. Unless the pantheon of the nation's greats is transformed into a triumvirate Patel's heritage is exposed to current political trends / aspirations / interventions that can convert and forge Patel's historical acts. The gravity of the problem with the Patel heritage can be clearly seen when we take a look at the Indian political palette. Every member has tried to expropriate the Patel discourse using different symbolic acts and they all want to present their own constructions.

By the political act of installing the square with statues, monuments and museums the BJP represents its own political greatness and commemorate their own immortality. We can say that the square can get under even bigger political pressure in India and therefore in case the academic historiography misses the chance to clarify the questions around Patel others will use the history in a legitimizing and identity creational way.

The results of the research 3

The construction of heroes of the Hindu nationalists: Lifting Deendayal Upadhyaya's ideology to national ranks

Treating Deendayal Upadhyaya as the most prominent figure of the Hindu nationalism is only acknowledged in the inner circles of the BJP. Despite this the party saw the figure of a national hero or at least a *grand homme* in him and with its representational policy it tried to make Deendayal Upadhyaya's memory national. In the cases we observed the commemorations carried a political message and got countrywide publicity. To highlight the three most important events:

- (1) In order to raise the public attention to the struggle against terror on the 25th of September in 2001, BJP activists organized a signature collection campaign on the anniversary of Deendayal Upadhyaya's birthday. They used the case of the struggle against terrorism to lash up anti-Pakistan feelings which is one of the fundamental methods of the Hindu nationalists to mobilize the masses.
- (2) In the solemn commemoration on the 25th of September in 2004 the leaders of the party evoked the importance of Deendayal Upadhyaya's acts and emphasized that his sacrifice for the modern and progressive India makes him a significant figure of the whole country.
- (3) On the 11th of February in 2005, on the anniversary of Deendayal Upadhyaya's death, Atal Bihari Vajpayee advised the society that by using the Integral Humanism principals of the well know ideologist they can end the religious violence. Stressing the universality of Upadhyaya is a central topic of the BJP's rhetoric as they want to make him the intellectual father of the whole nation.

Deendayal Upadhyaya has been a central figure of the BJP's identity but the party wanted to widen this identity consciousness and incorporate the figure of its ideologist into the national identity. They used every notable anniversary, national or local holiday in order to lift Deendayal Upadhyaya's memory to national level even though the ideology of Integral Humanism outlines the image of the integrated India only superficially. This India would primarily be the country of the Hindu majority that would exclude the Indian religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities.

Our next case study was the analysis of the conflict that broke out due to the removal of Deendayal Upadhyaya's statue in Rampur. The incident became a political attack for the BJP after the Minister for Urban Development of the local government Mohammad Azam Khan, a socialist politician, announced in 2005 that due to the frequent traffic accidents Deendayal Upadhyaya's statue had been removed from the junction. The local and national leaders of the BJP immediately mobilized the activists as they treated this event a direct outrage and envisaged a countrywide protest. Despite the threats the movement did not spread countrywide but we can observe the process of the creation of new heroes. The BJP in fact never disposed a hero that had grown from their inner circles and that was accepted by the whole nation. Therefore they wanted to make everyone see in this case as well that they do have a hero that serves the good of the nation and that the hateful and unfair acts of the local government caused damage for the whole country. As no spontaneous movement or protest that was organized by a political power developed we can clearly say that the remembrance of Upadhyaya has not enough coverage that could initiate a nationwide campaign in case of real statue destruction. This could have happened only if the public figure with

hero merits would have been kept in memory really as a person who stood up for his nation and who embodied the nation's virtues. However, the merits of Upadhyaya stagnated at the level of the Hindu nationalists and not even under the government of BJP could it break out from this. This is despite the party tried to show the ideologist who was known for his radical views as a hero who fights for the nation's unity.

The results of the research 4

The construction of heroes of the Hindu nationalists: The heroes and martyrs of the 1999 Indian Pakistani war

The soldiers who lost their lives during the 1999 Indian Pakistani conflict could be a part of the BJP's remembrance politics. With the help of them the BJP wanted to legitimize the national unity and the war successes of the BJP government.

With the solemn funerals, the ruling party wanted to make the memory of the soldiers who died in the conflict against the eternal enemy, Pakistan part of the national identity and pride. The political significance of the case study examined by us is clearly shown by the fact that the ten military officers who died in the war got the highest possible military award (*Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra*) posthumous and the year 1999 was registered as the year of the infantry (*jawans*) by the government. This act however did not create a national holiday as the Congress Party that got into power in 2004 did not carry on with this ceremony. According to the Congress Party glorifying the soldiers who died in the Kargil conflict served only particular political interests and did not represent the interests of the unified nation. One of the goals of the BJP government was to endorse the values and the traditions of the Hinduism on a national level. Paradoxically, it was rather the secular nature of the state was reflected in the attitude towards the Kargil war. They handled the funerals of the soldiers who were transported home equally regardless of their religious beliefs. Their greatness was not in fulfilling the Hindu or the Muslim moral code but rather in their patriotic feats. The events ran into a nationalist ceremony that had rather a secular nature. There were two goals of politically propagating the soldiers who either fought heroically or were tortured and killed in the Kargil conflict which was deemed victorious. The Congress Party envisaged martyrs who died tragically in a meaningless war that had an uncertain outcome. In contrast to this the BJP was talking about heroes who helped the country to achieve victory. Those who lost their lives while being tortured by the Pakistanis were both heroes and martyrs (generally on a local level). The national holiday is the celebration of the victorious war. And the national grief is for the heroes who lost their lives in the battlefield. The BJP also commemorated itself during both ceremonies. The BJP was the one that defended its nation and helped it achieving victory in a war. It was also the

BJP government that kept its civilized nature against the Pakistani cruelty. The state funerals and the erection of monuments acted as a tool to legitimize their political power and to create identity. It sent a message towards the society through the national rituals. Arousing the national feelings created an “imaginary fellowship” in the Anderson way in which the participants became a part of the same feeling. Nevertheless, the commemorations organised by the government could not become fully national. The Congress Party and its supporters did not take part in the state and local events, therefore the diversification of the country in a political sense just became stronger. Symbolic politics created only a fragile and temporary national unity.

Conclusions, thesis and directions of further research

During our research we found the following results promising with regards to the understanding of the Hindu nationalism, the BJP's remembrance policy, the new aspect of Sardar Patel's memory and the modern role of Upadhyaya.

- (a) Instead of forcing the new aspects of the Hindu nationalism into binary codes we described it with the definition of representational nationalism. The viability and justification of the creation of the definition seem to be verified by our case studies: the nationalist efforts to conquer the representational area and the systematic usage of symbols want to acquire a bigger influence not only among the religious but among the secular groups as well.
- (b) The nation-building aspirations of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* did not peter out in the reorganization of the state, the economics and the security. The course line of the new symbolic politics is provided by a so far unknown remembrance policy and the state funeral ceremony (organised in honour of the soldiers who lost their lives in the 1999 Kargil war) that is alien to the Indian traditions. The novelty in this is that the BJP wanted to secure the existence of the national unity with social (even secular) rituals and by giving up the creation of a Hindu state they wanted to constitute new bonding points (patriotism) with the Hindu organizations.
- (c) The occupation of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's political heritage started in the last to decades and this has a greater and greater significance in the BJP's political programme. The party wants to form a new legitimizing area through Patel's historical figure and memory in which the supporters of the party can move. By doing so the party could find the rival of the great figures of the Congress Party (Nehru, Gandhi).
- (d) The goal of the symbolic policy of the BJP is to involve the party's ideologist, Deendayal Upadhyaya in India's national pantheon. Spreading Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy, the

Integral Humanism, in the representational area became another aspect of the party's political strategy.

Designating the further directions of the research can be done by involving new case studies and by widening and diversifying the basic source. By involving other party veterans who belong to the party's identity like Savarkar, Golwalkar, Hedgewar, we can draw an even clearer picture about the representational goals of the BJP. With regards to the analytical methods, we could divide the real acts and the memories in order to understand the aspects of the evolvement of remembrance. With the methods of analytical discourse, the examination of the biographies and works of the people who rose to have hero status would bring us closer to the understanding of the Hindu nationalism. Along with the mentioned sources, studying the Indian school textbooks (e.g. what do they write about the nation, how do they evaluate a historical event, figure) and examine their creation and the social position of their authors would present new aspects of the nation-building and the hero-creation as well.

PUBLICATION LIST

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