



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

MARK HILL

BA (University of Victoria, 2014)

**“Theorizing State-Diaspora Engagement as a Social Practice
Decentering the Hindu Nation Through Narendra Modi’s
Diasporic Activism”**

Department of Political Science

Friday, April 13, 2018

10:00 A.M.

David Turpin Building

Room A318

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Reeta Tremblay, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Scott Watson, Department of Political Science, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:

Dr. Gregory Blue, Department of History, UVic

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Dr. Yin-Man Lam, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Abstract

To make sense of why states are dramatically shifting their agendas to focus on their diasporic population abroad, this project builds a theoretical model which makes sense of decisive shifts in political behavior between states and their external populations. A two-fold argument is presented to explain these shifts. First, analyses of diaspora should treat diaspora not as a bounded entity but as a process or social practice. This allows for a multi-level analysis which neither negates the role individuals play in the formation of diasporic identity nor denies the agency of states which actively engage in their own unique approach to identify, label or shape what constitutes their diaspora. Second, state-diasporic engagement practices can be better understood as an institutional practice, which in turn allow us to explain state behavioral change in terms of their diasporic populations and what factors elucidate diaspora to respond. It also allows us to ask two-fold questions – a) who the sending state targets, why they are targeted and when states increase their engagement with their diasporic populations abroad; and b) what policy tools states develop to encourage dependable contributions of the diaspora to its political agenda. These theoretical arguments are then applied to address the modern Indian state's approach and its shifting agenda to its diaspora. The intent is to provide a historical foundation from which to make sense of why the Indian diaspora evolved from a political liability under Jawaharlal Nehru to an instrument of strength in the early 1990s. This thesis concludes with an exploration of the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's discourse and state practices and suggests that India's accelerated engagement of the Indian diaspora to be representative of a muscular Hindu nationalist agenda. In short, Modi's engagement of the Indian diaspora should be understood as part of a nation-building project which seeks to communicate to both domestic and international audiences alike that India and Indians are first and foremost Hindu.