

Book Review

Paul Robert Brass (1991).
*Ethnicity and Nationalism:
Theory and Comparison.* New
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Ethnicity became a core topic in the field of social sciences and attracted various researchers from different backgrounds. With the emergence of nation-states, ethnic identity became a focal point for debate and discussion. Scholars have started working on different issues related to ethnicities, such as ethnic conflicts, ethnic cleansing, ethnic politics, and ethnic nationalism. But Paul Brass's work provides a comprehensive view in understanding all these issues.

The book has divided categorized into three parts, and each section is consisting of three chapters. The book is an extension of Paul Brass's earlier work on Language, Religion and Politics in North India published in 1974. The book has based on two main arguments; firstly, ethnicity and nationalism are social and political constructions. Secondly, they are modern phenomena connected with the activities of the modern centralizing state.

Paul brass defines an ethnic group in terms of objective cultural markers, say Language and Religion. These markers separate one ethnic group from another more clearly than subjective and behavioural markers. But just a group of people having the same objective markers cannot make them an ethnic community or ethnic nationality. The transitions from ethnic group to ethnic community or nationality happen under certain specific circumstances. Brass points out two main factors which played an essential role in these transitions. One is elite competition, and second is the interaction of the state with the elite.

In multi-ethnic societies, different kinds of elites from different ethnic groups or within the same ethnic group, competing and conflicting for power and control over new opportunities by mobilizing an ethnic group through the manipulation of cultural symbols. The selection of cultural symbols for mobilization of an ethnic group depends upon the elites to

which they found useful to build internal unity and in their conflict with others. The controversy over Hindi-Urdu language as an official language in north India during British rule, both Hindu elites and Muslim elites found it potential bases for promoting identity and differentiating one group from another. From this point of view, ethnic identity is not as fixed but constructed by the elites through the manipulation of cultural symbols.

Paul brass argued that it is not only elite competition but also the interaction between centralizing state and elites from regional or non-dominant ethnic category through which ethnic identity arises. In multi-ethnic societies different ethnic group elites always remain in conflict and cooperation with each other, the state takes advantage of it and seeks to gain its control over the particular region either through the support of one group over another or divide the group to stabilize their own power. For instance, Punjab crisis during the 1960s and 1980s state leaders split Akali Dal, which was dominated in that particular region to strengthen their footing. The unequal distribution of the resources by the state also leads to ethnic group conflict and differentiation between ethnic groups which in turn lead to ethnic mobilization by the elites.

Paul brass throughout his work used two primary objective cultural markers; Language and religion, which have potential bases for differentiating and mobilizing ethnic groups and also useful for ethnic group elites for political and economic gain for themselves and for the group as a whole. In multi-ethnic societies, these are leading factors for conflict among ethnic groups. The case studies in the book have based on these two variables. For instance, to strengthen the USSR, Russification was adopted as a solution to the soviet multilingual issue. In India, Hindi-Urdu official language issue between Hinds and Muslims in north India or Punjabi Language and Sikh religion issue during Punjab crisis.

In the concluding chapter, Brass discussed the consociational approach put forth by Arend Lijphart, which argued that there is a possibility of stability and democracy in plural societies. It is an alternative for reducing the conflicts in multi-ethnic societies. But according to Brass, it offers no guarantee of democratic stability in plural societies than the systems of competitive politics that have persisted in such societies as Canada and India.

The book provides a deep understanding of ethnicity and ethnic minority groups in modern centralizing societies. It is a great effort and a valuable asset for students of sociology, anthropology, political science and researchers in the field of minority studies, cultural studies, ethnography and Language and religion studies. Policymakers can also utilize it for effective planning.

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