

Title: Guns, Germs, and Steel

Author: Jared Diamond

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Genre: Non-Fictional

Book Review by: Mohsin Ali Baig

Jared Diamond's 'Guns, Germs, and Steel', published in 1997, Britain is a non-fiction book aimed at giving answers and uncovering some of the major dynamics involved in societies' development. In the beginning, Diamond proclaims that more than any intrinsic drive, it was the question from an African individual named "Yali", on seeking to discern the mystery behind Eurasia's unprecedented development, which essentially directed him to write the book.

The book largely spins around narrating and explaining some of the substantial reasons behind the Eurasian continent's notable progress and historical dominance over Africa and other societies of the world. Subsequently, it revolves around the melody of giving answers to the questions like why societies are divided as they are today. What factors made some societies/regions in particular Eurasia more developed and advanced than others like Latin America and Africa. Throughout the book, Diamond argues why some nations (Eurasia) developed and progressed more than others and more specifically under what dynamics that disparity occurred.

In the initial part of the book, Diamond centers his arguments on the notion of 'geographical determinism', that how Eurasia always had access to ample reservoirs of mineral resources, plentiful water supply, and appropriate climate for the growing of valuable crops like wheat, rice, and barley than other societies. Similarly, his conjecture taking the advantage of the East-West axis over the North-South is decisive. Chiefly, because of the apt environment, and encouraging geographical network, migration took place smoothly, trade and communication became unflustered, which, significantly, became the vehicle for the spread of their ideas, culture and ultimately steered their societies towards development and prosperity. While on the other parts of the world extreme environment and geographical terrain, largely in the African and Latin American continent was relatively inhospitable to grow crops and settle societies for too long.

Correspondingly, he maintains that it was the promising topography that not only led the native Europeans to domesticate more prized animals i.e. horses, upon which initially they travelled, and then spread their culture and ideas robustly and conveniently. Diamond further adds that fertile land for farming, raw materials like iron and wood, advantageous mammals like horses for traveling, cows for plowing, sheep and pigs for meat and domestication empowered them to linger on their livelihood with significant lenience. Consequently, vast access to the trade of

treasured goods also assisted them to expand across Africa, Latin America, and Asia with much greater control, (Jackson 2016).

Further, the grounds Diamond makes in the middle part of the book are substantially conspicuous. For instance, his revelatory stand on the foundation of the development of Eurasia like the presence of domesticable animals and plants/crops along with the abundance of natural resources are appealing and well supported by historical events. Subsequently, the existence of surplus food crops not only favored Eurasian societies' sustenance but also led to their unfettered expansion. Subsequently, this paved the way for them to build their armies to subdue indigenous societies elsewhere diplomatically and forcefully, allowing them to shape into kingdoms and eventually to mighty empires to rule over the world.

Astoundingly, more than the role of science, Diamond, in his book, has deemed that it was mere incidental 'good fortune' of the Eurasian continent and the subsequent wit of native Europeans that became the major determinant in their progress. Subsequently, the book is fascinating and thought-provoking in a sense that, unlike the revisionist narrative, the author in his book has attempted to uncover and falsify the ever-present hysteria on the racial superiority of whites. Instead, he has maintained that all the people have originated from a single African region with the same biological qualities and capabilities for creativity and critical thinking. Thus, it was the development of guns, germs, and steel that ensured that Europeans settled the Americas, Oceania, and Southern Africa, eliminating or subduing local populations which were unable to resist them, (Tomlinson T, 1998).

In addition, Diamond has referred to germs as being the deadliest weapon in history to ever exist. In explanation, he has expounded the chronicle that, with the spread of trade and travel between societies, different diseases also traveled. Subsequently, the native Europeans were able to build immunity against various contagious diseases long before the African and Latin American societies, largely because of their close association with domesticated animals. Consequently, this polarized spread of diseases to the Latin American and African continent was devastating, as it led to the death of millions of natives and the extermination of many indigenous societies.

Contrarily speaking, throughout the book, Diamond has maintained a precarious stance in his arguments which for many people/scholars might strike conflictual and

biased. He has evidently snubbed to extend due acknowledgment to the inventors/pioneers of Eurasia and their credentials which after all made the basis for their development. To put it shortly, it was substantially due to the native Europeans wit, willingness and vision that consequently made their development in political, economic, and cultural spheres imaginable and attainable.

Similarly, he has been unable to give due emphasis to the vitality of institutions for the development of societies, which has given his critics a premise to base their arguments against his assumptions. 'History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among people's environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves' (p.25). However, it seems astounding that, as an evolutionary biologist, Diamond seems unaware that different environments are caused by natural selection, biological differences among populations, (Rushton P, 1997).

Although in his book he has slightly considered the important role of economics and politics for development, some would argue that Diamond has understated their place in history, placing too much emphasis on the mantra of science and geography. He has in an abridged manner put enough emphasis on the positive and negative effects of exceptional individuals or pioneers who led the process of unprecedented progress. Subsequently, he has unfairly overlooked to shed due light on the importance of ideology, religion, and culture which have equally driven and influenced (positively or negatively) states/societies' development and their underdevelopment in history, (Fenigsohn H, 2011).

All in all, the book 'Guns, Germs and Steel' justifies the geographical and environmental factors that shaped the modern world. A worth reading book for those who are interested in history, trends and dynamics of societies and civilizations development, and most importantly the importance of geography in determining the fates of societies and states.

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