

Brothers with the lyrical names

WAQAR A KHAN

I arrived in Islamabad as a schoolboy along with my family from Dhaka in January, 1968. The new capital city of Pakistan was still in its nascent stage of development. To the north of Islamabad lay the small semi-autonomous principality of Swat ruled by a Wali. It was visited by Queen Elizabeth II, during her trip to Pakistan (she also came to former East Pakistan now Bangladesh) in

1961. She famously coined the enviable sobriquet of 'Switzerland of the East' for Swat, because of its pleasant weather, the enthralling beauty of its snow-capped mountains, vales and placid lakes. The Queen was enchanted by it all. The following story is about two brothers from Swat, with the lyrical names of: Naushe-e-Rawan and Bakth-

e-Rawan. The year was 1970. Naushe was an office peon of my father at the 'planning commission' in Islamabad. For a Yousufzai Pashtun (Pathan) from Swat he was of a medium height, fair of complexion with light brownish hair and a slightly pock-marked face. He was in his mid-20s. His younger brother Bakth-e-Rawan lived up in the hills of Swat, in their remote village home.

over rocks which flowed downwards with a musical cadence. Bakth with Grecian features and fair complexion, was employed as a domestic hand in our house to run errands. However, as I showed Bakth around the house, kitchen and the backyard, it occurred to me that his seemingly sedate behavior perhaps masked a more youthful exuberance. There was that all-knowing half crescent smile and a twinkle in his hazel eyes, which at close proximity looked like those of a mischievous cat. Bakth slowly settled down to his daily chores and life went on as usual.

Meanwhile, about three months would elapse before there were visible signs of serious trouble with Bakth. He would often whistle and hum a song around the house for which he was reprimanded by our parents. He sulked for a couple of days and was heard to mutter, "hum toh kisi ka qaidi nahi hoon" (I am not anyone's prisoner). One day, the pious darwan, a middle-aged man, complained that his sleep was often disturbed because of Bakth's raucous singing. Once when he had scolded Bakth and threatened to box his ears, Bakth had surreptitiously put salt in his tea. The darwan also complained about his vanishing acts. He said that while we took our afternoon nap, a customary ritual in bygone days, Bakth would sneak out of the house and go to a nearby tea-stall and spend time with some unsavory characters. This alarmed my parents since these rickety 'Jhopris' (shacks) were known to sell 'charas/ganja' or cannabis. The darwan also reported that on a few occasion Bakth had sneaked out of the house by scaling the wall late at night to watch Punjabi/Urdu movies in the nearby town of Rawalpindi, with his newly found friends. Afterwards, he would slip back into the house at dawn. He had also been offending the puritan sensibilities of the darwan by repeatedly belting out a line of a love song from an Urdu film he had recently watched. It went somewhat like this: "aaja meri jaan, aaja meri piyare" (come hither my

love, come to me my beloved). I have personally heard the darwan scream "Khamosh! Yea betamizee bundh karo" (Shut up! Stop this nonsense). Once I found Bakth sitting on a sofa in our drawing room watching TV. I was aghast and immediately told him to quit the room. He was hurt and left crestfallen. Again, he was heard to mutter, "mein to kisi ka qaidi nahin hoon." Meanwhile, he would often talk about his village life to me. It would change his somber facial countenance to one of joy. It was obvious that he was missing the carefree life of his 'gaon' (village) he was used to.

One day, Bakth failed to show up for work in the morning. The darwan was called in. He reported that Bakth was unwell. Our mother asked the darwan to take the morning breakfast to Bakth, and keep an eye on his welfare. However, Bakth did not eat anything the whole day except for some tea and an occasional drink of water. The darwan further reported that Bakth was running a fever. Father arranged for Bakth to be taken to the government polyclinic (doctor's clinic) at G-6/3 in Islamabad with the darwan. Bakth looked pale and gaunt. In the next two days his condition took a nosedive. He started to retch violently. Our mother was afraid that Bakth may die on us. And, on his sudden premature death, she envisioned his Pathan relatives descending upon us with vengeance from the heights of Swat with guns blazing! We laughed a lot about it.

Soon Naushe arrived and spent a better part of the afternoon trying to talk and feed his brother Bakth. However, he could not succeed much in discerning the cause of his ailment. He apologetically told father that it would be better if he took his brother back to Swat. Our mother was overjoyed. Frankly, I was a bit saddened to see Bakth go. There was something endearing about his rustic youthful vigor. However, when I went to his room I was in for a big surprise! The lad who could barely stir yesterday, was now briskly engaged in packing his few belongings into bundles.

For possession he had a small transistor radio and a worn-out shoulder-bag for his clothes. He stood ramrod straight and eyeballed me with a grin. It was then that he opened up. He told me that one of the tea boys at the 'chai ke dokan' he befriended, had borrowed 50 rupees from him and absconded. I was appalled. Bakth hurled a flurry of the choicest invectives at the thief and at Punjabis in general. He detested people of the plains, he told me with a huff. It was homesickness coupled with the theft that got him so depressed. That is why he had fallen ill.

Suddenly, he became quite garrulous and broke into neurotic rambles. Torrents of words flowed forth some of it unintelligible because it was in Pushto or Yousufzai dialect. However, it all sounded like a litany of grievances. He then turned to me in earnest and started pleading in Urdu. Translated into English it would be something like this: "Respected sir, will you go with me to my village home high up in the hills? Don't be afraid, I'll always be beside you. On our way up, I shall pluck sweet ripe apples from the orchard for you to eat. You will then drink cold water from the stream to your heart's content. Next, you will stretch yourself and inhale lungs full of fresh air and a transformation will come over you. You will start to feel that you are at last free!" And, as if to emphasize his points he dramatically enacted some of what he said. I was rendered speechless!

It suddenly occurred to me that we had unwittingly brought a carefree, happy-go-lucky 'creature' from the wilderness, nay, from the very lap of 'mother nature' and entrapped him in the alien environment of a city amidst mundane rules. He felt enslaved, as if in fetters. That explained the better part of his ailment. It was as much an affliction of the soul as it was of the heart and mind. "Farewell, Bakth-e-Rawan, wherever you are," I said to myself. "May you remain in life or death, forever free!"

Waqar A Khan is the Founder of Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies.



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Bakth was a school drop-out having read up to class IV, in a school located at some distance from his village. At 16 years of age, he was now in need of a job. He had never ventured much out of his sleepy little village, where clouds caressed the mountain tops, rolling mist played in its bewitching vales and gurgling waterfalls cascaded

On Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*

SHIREEN MAINUDDIN

Guns, Germs and Steel was first published in 1997 and received the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction the following year. Reading this book has been an incredible experience. Each time I put the book down for the day I had to gasp for air because I had been totally immersed, rather like deep sea diving and looking at the world in a new dimension.

The depth and breadth of the knowledge that Diamond has passed on is vast, and the questions that he has raised remain a challenge. One does not have to agree with his opinions but the book serves to activate the mind in a hitherto unknown manner.

Jared Diamond is one of the US's most celebrated scholars. A Professor of Geography and Physiology at the University of California, he is equally renowned for his work in the fields of ecology and evolutionary biology and for his ground breaking studies of the birds of Papua New Guinea. Other than the Pulitzer, his prizes and honours include the U.S National Medal of Science, the Tyler Prize for Environmental Science, and election to the U.S National Academy of Sciences etc. As a biological explorer his most publicized finding was the rediscovery, on the New Guinea highlands, of the Golden Fronted Bower Bird which had not been seen for almost a century.

Guns, Germs and Steel starts around 11000 BC and is divided into four parts, within which, each chapter covers different issues. To summarize the book, if at all possible, the author states that he was inspired by a question from Yali a local politician in New Guinea who asked him, "Why is that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea when we black people had little cargo of our own?"

Throughout the book, Diamond seeks an answer to that query but

not from a racist point of view. He is an American and his constitutional belief that 'all men are created equal' forms the premise of his research.

Using the equality of man as his cornerstone, he examines in great detail the growth of certain ancient human settlements in the world and the reason why some of them achieved the basics of food production earlier than others. Food production and food surplus being the basic requirement for humans to move upwards into the next stage of development. Diamond, however, does not make any references to the Indus Valley civilization, and when writing about linguistic development, fails to mention the Indo Aryan group of languages. His emphasis in on the parts of the world that he is familiar with, New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand, North and South America and Europe and Africa with most of his focus on the America's and Australia/ New Guinea.

Diamond compares world history to an onion, "One has to keep taking off the layers. History is not just one damned fact after another. There really are broad patterns to history and the search for their explanation is as productive as it is fascinating."

Diamond commences by giving an analysis of the world prior to 11000 BC. He proceeds to write about the effect of geography on shaping societies on Polynesian Islands, with human movement from the mainland to Islands, across the seas, in ancient times being his prime focus. Continuing with migration, he covers the defeat of the Inca Emperor by the Spanish. The result of the victory, was the subsequent colonization of the New World by Europeans, the resultant disappearance of most groups of Native Americans and the biggest population shift of modern times.

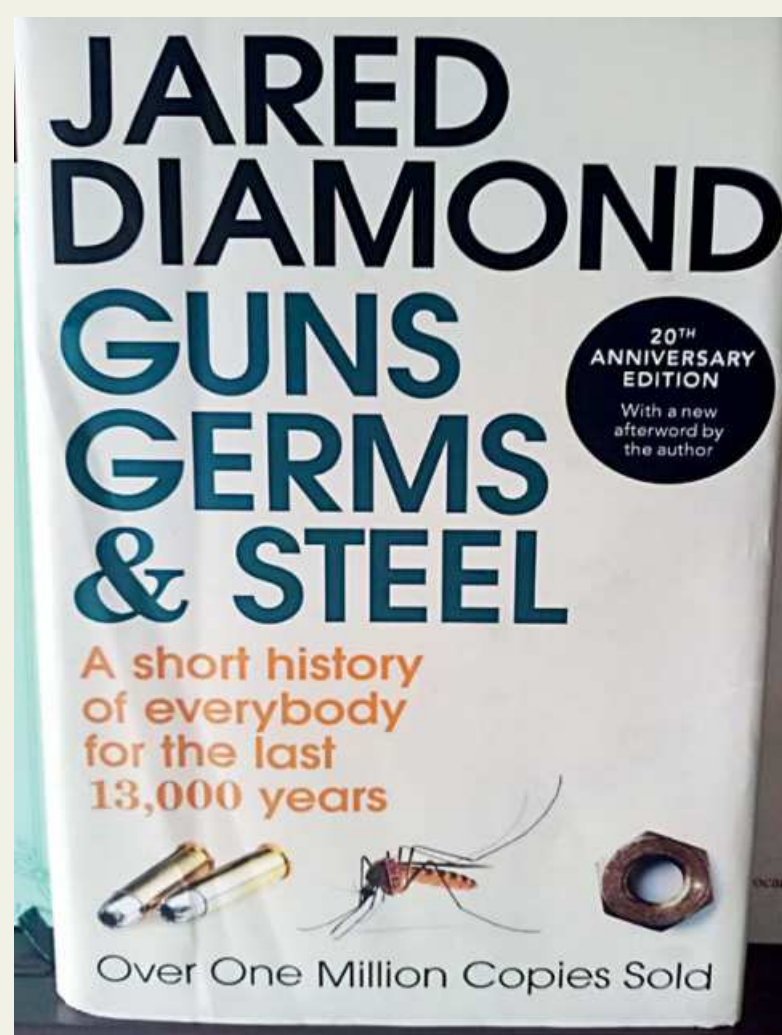
The second section talks about the rise of food production and how

farmer power forms the root of *Guns, Germs and Steel*. He puts forward his theory that geographic differences provided the greatest advantage in the onset of food production and the major reason why people from certain areas flourished over others. His views are especially important in the context of geographic changes that are likely to be caused by climate change.

Diamond goes from food to guns germs and steel in the third section in which he covers the evolution of germs, writing, technology, government and organized religion.

His views on the evolution of germs and the connection to domesticated animals is of particular importance in the present pandemic as he states that given human proximity to the animals that are kept as pets and those that have been domesticated, the human body is getting constantly bombarded by their microbes. He cites four stages in the evolution of a specialized human disease from an animal precursor with the first being the diseases directly transmitted to us from our pets and domestic animals. Examples of such diseases are cat scratch fever from our cats and leptospirosis from dogs. Human beings are similarly liable to pick up diseases from wild animals such as the tularemia from skinning wild rabbits.

In the second stage, a former animal pathogen evolves to the point where it does get transmitted directly and causes epidemics. However, the epidemic dies out for any of several reasons, such as being cured by modern medicine, or being stopped when everybody around has already been infected and either becomes immune or dies. He gives the example of Onyong-nyong fever which appeared in East Africa in 1959 and proceeded to infect several million Africans. The fact that



the patients recovered quickly and became immune to further attack helped the new disease to die out quickly.

Interestingly, Diamond refrains from mentioning Spanish flu although it killed millions all over the world. The final stage of this evolution of germs is represented by the major long established epidemic diseases which remain confined to humans.

He emphasizes the importance of lethal microbes in human history and uses the European conquest and depopulation of the America's

as an example. "Far more Native Americans died in bed from Eurasian germs than on the battlefield from European guns and swords." Small pox, measles influenza and typhus competed for the top rank among the killers. The Aborigines of Australia and the Maori population of New Zealand faced similar extinction.

The book ends with a whirlwind tour of the histories of Australia and New Guinea, East Asia, Austronesian expansion, a historical comparison of Eurasia and the Americas, and Africa.

A singularly fascinating in *Guns Germs and Steel* is the detailed

description of the defeat of the Inca Emperor on the 16th of November 1532 on his home turf in Peru, by the Spanish Conquistador Francisco Pizarro with only 168 Spanish soldiers. Diamond traces the chain of causation in this confrontation and the role played by guns, germs and steel.

Pizarro's military advantage lay in the Spaniards steel swords and other weapons, steel armor, guns and horses. In comparison, Atahualpa's troops were foot soldiers and had only stone, bronze or wooden clubs, hand axes, plus slingshots and quilted armors.

The Inca Empire was divided because of a battle between Atahualpa and his half-brother. The reason for this civil war was that an epidemic of small pox had spread among native South American Indians, after the germ arrived with Spanish Settlers in Panama and Colombia. The disease had killed the Inca Emperor Capac, his designated heir and most of the court officials. These deaths led to a contest for the throne between Atahualpa and his half-brother with the latter gaining ascendancy of the throne but not having the necessary training for the position.

Diamond concludes by making a passionate plea for history to be treated as a science in much the same way as Political Science and Economics and recommends a Nobel Prize be established for history.

At times, Diamond meanders, in other instances he places too much information for the reader to digest but it is an incredible journey that he takes us on. The book is as meaningful as it was when first published and perhaps in the context of the present human versus virus encounter even more so.

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