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First Year Experience

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Jared Diamond's Pakistan

In Jared Diamond's book Guns, Germs, and Steel early food production is identified as one of the most important proximate causes for the development of society. With that in mind, why is Pakistan, one of the first food producing areas, not a major world power? The height of the ancient Harappan society of that region, to the current poverty experienced by Greg Mortenson, while building schools in Pakistan, flies in the face of Diamond's theory for the fates of societies.

Pakistan began largely as part of what is now referred to in anthropology and geography as the Indian subcontinent. The Indian subcontinent is a subtropical environment which varies highly due to its diverse landscape. In northern India and Pakistan the Himalayan Mountains produce a cold and sparse environment. But in western India and Pakistan there is a fertile area known as the Indus River valley. The Indus River flows south from the base of the Himalayas to the Arabian Sea. It was this lush and highly fruitful river which gave birth to the third oldest world civilization (Diamond, 100).

Ideally situated between China and the Fertile Crescent the Harappan society received many early advantages. Food packages of wheat and barley traveled east from the Fertile Crescent around the same time, 7500bc., that rice and the subtropical food package of bananas, oranges, and melons, traveled west from China and southeastern Asia. Both these food packages served as to spark further independent plant and animal domestication. By 7000bc. pulses such as the hyacinth bean, black gram, and green gram, had become food staples, while animals such as the chicken, goat, cattle, and sheep,

also grew within Harappan life (Katz, 269). A complete table of foods and proteins allowed the society to become sedentary and to quickly expand. By 2000bc. the civilization reached its peak, with a network of large cities which engaged in regular trade. The early Indus civilization had its own writing system, a loose mother-goddess religion, and a highly stratified political leadership (Gall and Gall, 473). With such a head start it is baffling how Diamond's theory fails to explain modern Pakistan.

Jared Diamond explains food production as a cause for three of his more proximate causes for the development of society. Diamond attributes a successful and long society to the production of government and religion, the proliferation and resistance of germs, and the rise of technology, including that of conquest or protection. It is that last element which the early Indus civilization was missing. Beginning in 1800bc., tribes of nomadic Aryan pastoralists arrived in Pakistan, through northeastern Afghanistan. These nomads rode in chariots behind horses and wielded early bronze age weaponry. The peaceful Harappan had no defense and the society quickly diminished. Coupled with seasonal shifts, including drier winters, and warmer summers, the agriculture of the remaining Indus people declined until the civilization was no longer existent. During this same period though, the Aryans settled the modern province of Punjab, north of the Sindh province in Pakistan. Between 1000bc. and 600bc. the Aryan invaders became sedentary and formed one of the earliest religions, Hinduism (Gall and Gall, 473).

So despite the disappearance of the Harappan society, the Aryans managed to restart the long historic path that Jared Diamond creates between his ultimate and proximate causes. The Aryans continued to expand and settled most of the modern country of India. In the following two millennia though, no less than twelve invading societies swept through ancient Pakistan. This mortality of leadership and culture crippled any long historic patterns that were forming there. These invaders included Darius of the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great from Macedonia, Chandragupta from

Southeastern modern India, Menander I a Greek King from northeast Afghanistan, the Scythians from Central Asia, the Parthians from the modern country of Turkmenistan, Kushans from southwestern modern China, the Sassanians from Persia, the Huns from Central Asia, the Arabs from Damascus, Hindus from northern India, and then the Mongols from northern Asia in the early middle ages(1221-1307ad.)(Gall and Gall, 475).

Each time these invaders would end in an area either east or west of the Indus River. Modern India, that is, remained less disrupted by the changes of leadership. In the late 19th century both regions were conquered by the British Empire. For about 100 years the British had colonial control of the Indus valley. In 1947 a border was drawn between two new nations, just east of the Indus River, based on religious difference. This line was later modified in 1971 to reflect geographic boundaries created by the northern mountainous terrain (Mortenson, 212). Pakistan would, from then on, be an Islamic Republic, and India would be united by Hinduism.

In the past 50 years the Pakistani people have become independent and completely modified their government, and have adopted the least spoken language, Urdu, 7.6 percent of people speaking it, as the national language. Food production has decreased to 22 percent of the gross domestic product as of 2008, and less than 19 percent of the labor force is involved in the production of technology (Maher, 3464 and 3482). It is overwhelming how the course of history has denied the prediction that could have been made 13,000 years ago using Jared Diamond's theory. But it is also interesting how his theory can be used to explain Pakistan's modern place in the world as of a shorter prediction. Had we no knowledge of the previous great society of the Harappan in the Indus River valley, we could expect that a region of tribes which had frequent change in occupational rulers would turn out as the country Greg Mortenson found himself in attempting to educate poor children.

Diamond's theory is also proven by the fact that after the Aryan invaders from central Asia annihilated the Harappan society they formed their own society, the Hindu society of India. This society, while shortly ruled by the British, can still be seen today as the emerging world power of India.

It is not necessary to reject the entire theory. But anyone hoping to predict the future using it, must be careful to understand the temporalness of even the most developed societies. Jared Diamond says "Over the past 13,000 years the predominant trend in human society has been the replacement of smaller, less complex units by larger, more complex ones. Obviously, that is no more than an average long-term trend, with innumerable shifts in either direction (Diamond, 281)." He acknowledges that well developed societies such as the Harappan may be overcome by smaller societies, such as the nomadic Aryans, but that generally a trend can be seen for the progression of societies into larger empires as seen later with the growth of the Aryans into the Hindus.

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