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### Jack Weatherford. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*

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**Jack Weatherford. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*.  
New York: Broadway Books, 2004.**

Reviewed by Ashok Kumar Malhotra

Jack Weatherford's book *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* is divided into three segments. Part one tells the story of Genghis Khan's birth in 1162, his rise to power on the steppe, and the influence of the steppe in shaping his mindset. Growing up in this wilderness helped fashion the personality which led him to consolidate many warring tribes into a single Mongolian country by 1206. Furthermore, unifying these diverse ethnic groups into a Mongolian nation provided Genghis Khan an excellent model which he replicated in the rest of the world. Part two is devoted to the Mongols' wars, lasting for five decades from 1211 to 1261, and how during these crusades, they applied this model of no boundaries to the nations of the world. While they conquered, they also unified the conquered territories to build a global village without walls. Part three delineates how the Mongol model of a global country provided "the foundations of the political, commercial, and military institutions of our modern society."

*Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* got excellent reviews from scholars and readers. The Washington Post elevated it to a piece of classic literature by saying the book "Reads like Iliad...Part travelogue, part epic narrative."

The book is an exciting testament to Weatherford's painstaking research; it portrays the history of the Mongolian empire starting with Genghis Khan in 1206, stretching for 8 centuries, and showing its last vestiges in the 1960's.

Geoffrey Chaucer, in *The Canterbury Tales' Squire's Tale* in 1395, appropriately captures the glory of the Mongols by extolling Genghis Khan as the greatest of all greats with the following remarks:

This noble king was called Genghis Khan,  
Who in his time was of so great renown  
That there was nowhere in no region  
So excellent a lord in all things.

The above quote captures the spirit of this man who made history "by conquering in 25 years more people and lands than all the Roman emperors captured in 400 years."

Weatherford highlights the global accomplishments of the Mongols as follows:

Genghis Khan, together with his sons and grandsons, conquered the most densely populated civilizations of the thirteenth century. Whether measured by the total number of people defeated, the sum of the countries annexed, or by the total area occupied, Genghis Khan conquered more than twice as much as any other man in history...At its zenith, the empire covered between 11 and 12 million contiguous square miles, an area about the size of the African continent and considerably larger than North America, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean combined. It stretched from the snowy tundra of Siberia to the hot plains of India, from the rice paddies of Vietnam to the wheat fields of Hungary, and from Korea to the Balkans. The majority of people today live in countries conquered by the Mongols; on the modern map, Genghis Khan's conquest includes 30 countries with well over 3 billion people. The most astonishing aspect of this achievement is that the entire Mongol tribe under him numbered around a million, smaller than the workforce of some modern corporations. From this million, he recruited his army, which was comprised of no more than one hundred thousand warriors — a group that could comfortably fit into large sports stadiums of the modern era.

Weatherford underscores some of the lasting contributions of the Mongols, beginning with Genghis Khan and his grandson Kublai Khan all the way to the Mughal Emperors of India. His book opened up my eyes to the numerous gifts of the Mongols to humanity. To name a few, the Mongols were responsible for giving to the world the universal mail delivery system, paper currency, cheap places for gathering and stayovers, and tea houses as well as effacing national barriers through destroying castles and statues of leaders and instituting free trade among nations, leading to globalization. Their social reforms included educating all children and adults, declaring equality among men and women, levying no taxes on doctors, artists, artisans, teachers and scholars, and bringing diverse religions together and creating a universal language with a common dialect. On the political front, they consolidated the diverse warring tribes by creating the present day countries of Russia, China, the Middle East, and Slavic principalities and India.

Moreover, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the Second World War, both Hitler and the Allies were so impressed by the war tactics of Genghis Khan such as “surprise attack” that they used it at different times.

Even Columbus read the diaries of Marco Polo to attempt to re-discover the glorious kingdom of Kublai Khan or China. When he landed on the island of Jamaica, he assumed that he had reached India which would ultimately take him to China. He mistook the Native Americans as Indians even though they had nothing to do with India.

On another level, Weatherford's *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* presents a critique of the accomplishments of the Enlightenment, to which the West pays reverent homage. Most of the writers who show obeisance to the Enlightenment neglect to mention its ignoble aspects, which consist of bringing into the Western vocabulary and practice the culture of racism by highlighting the superiority of the white race over the inferior black and brown races.

According to Weatherford, the writings of such scholars of the Enlightenment as Voltaire and others demonized the black and brown races as less developed physically, emotionally and intellectually. They were dubbed as animals, to be used and abused by making them slaves to work in the fields and to be bought and sold as one's property. Even the scientists of the Enlightenment wrote books on evolution to justify the inferior development or the under-development of the black and brown races by using the term "Mongoloid" for them.

The outcome of this racial bias spilled over when the white Europeans through the use of force captured African men, women and children by selling them as slaves to the recently discovered North and South Americas. This slave trade was a profitable business which brought millions of black Africans to till the fields of USA and South American countries, making the USA the biggest producer of cotton and tobacco in the world. For the Spanish and Portuguese, South America became their milk cow. They mined gold and silver in the occupied countries of South America and shipped these precious metals to Europe, thus making their countries extremely rich. All this money-spinning work was accomplished through the sweat and blood of Black Africans and Native Americans.

Being driven by the Enlightenment, the British, French and Dutch colonized systematically the countries of Africa, India and South East Asia. The British not only occupied India but saw to it that after defeating the last Mughal emperor in 1859, they declared India to be a part of the British Empire. In order to get rid of any future threats to their colonization, the British slaughtered the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the Mughal so that no traces of Mongols would be left anywhere. Furthermore, in 1859 when the combined forces of India including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others fought against the British to free themselves from the tyranny of colonization, the victorious British dubbed this war as a mutiny because "they as the victors were writing the history."

Weatherford's *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* is a thoroughly researched book by a cultural anthropologist. As a miracle worker he devoted more than half a dozen years and took numerous trips to Mongolia, documenting the story of this luminous warrior whose contributions to humanity should stand out more than his cruelties toward the conquered ones.

However, we — the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century — not only are ignorant of the historical past but are totally unaware of how much the Mongols contributed toward the making of our modern world. We take these contributions of the Mongols for granted without realizing that we stand on the shoulders of these giants of the past who made attempts at bringing the world together as one human family.

The book is a must read for all those students of history and culture who want to know who we are, where we are, and how in some clandestine way the Mongols have contributed to our present day progress and existential predicament.