Midterm Essay

Name: Imranul Hasan Emon

ID: 20301142

Section: 03

Introduction:

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said, "To rule is easy; to govern is difficult (Von Goethe, 2022b)." This phrase points out the complicated nature of leadership and the obstacles faced by the ancient civilizations to enforce their government. The ruling may seem straightforward because it is construed to be all about direct control over the people as well as an authority element. However, governing is not that easy. Because it involves structuring a society and requires balancing different interests while preserving stability for a long time. The ancient civilizations had to come up with institutions that would not only answer their immediate concerns but also secure the future of the societies as well. These ancient societies had to face some fundamental questions about authority and order such as 'who shall rule?' and 'how shall power be exercised?'. The monarchies and non-monarchies evolved as two alternate forms to answer such questions. Monarchies usually had one ruler and powers were centralized in that one person through divine rights or succession. These kings or rulers ruled over large territories and diverse peoples and ensured the continuation of their houses. On the other hand, the non-monarchies wanted to share power. They used mechanisms like democracy and republicanism in which they granted citizens the right to participate in the decision-making process. However, both systems had their respective strengths and weaknesses. Monarchies were stable but could become oppressive and non-monarchies provided citizens a voice but occasionally suffered with conflicts. Geography had a big influence on shaping these systems too. Every ancient civilization had to use its limited land and resources very carefully in order to survive and grow. Monarchical civilizations such as Egypt and China necessarily centralized their power along the life-giving waterways and rich fertile lands. In contrast, non-monarchical civilizations such as Athens and Rome expanded their influence by forming trade and alliances throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Governance also played a significant role in the shaping of people's roles in society. One important area where governance had a significant influence was in the status of women. The role of women varied in both monarchy and non-monarchy systems. Though some women became influential through royal positions, monarchies tended to restrict their power. Non-monarchies supposedly provided more freedom to women compared to monarchies but still, they had to face numerous restrictions. This essay will analyse the governance frameworks of

ancient monarchical and non-monarchical establishments focusing on their geographical strategies and political ideologies along with the roles of women in the society while examining how these governance systems have determined the social structure and the distribution of power within the society.

Body paragraph 1:

The geographical locations and political ideals of both ancient monarchies and non-monarchies significantly influenced their governance systems including resource management, territorial control and societal power structures. Geography was not merely a passive feature for ancient civilisations rather it was a dynamic factor in constituting the political mechanisms of governance of those civilizations. Ancient monarchies such as Egypt and China usually depended on resources like rivers and agricultural land to create and sustain centralised authority. In ancient Egypt, the Nile River provided the necessary life-giving sources which unified the kingdom. The flooding of the Nile was predictable and these floodings allowed extremely fertile soil to take hold which agricultural productivity could thrive. This excessive amount of resources strengthened the authority of the pharaohs who were considered divine rulers responsible for maintaining balance and prosperity (Bard, 2015). This centralized governance allowed the monarchy to regulate the modes of production through the distribution of land and taxation which kept power in the hands of the ruling elite. Unlike ancient Egypt, the Yellow River Valley became the heart of the ancient Chinese civilization. The rich resources contributed to the forming of highly powerful dynasties including the Shang and Zhou. These dynasties employed central government systems founded on the "Mandate of Heaven." This concept postulated that emperors ruled with the endorsement of a god (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006). These beliefs not only made their rule legitimate but also made them able to manage large projects such as irrigation systems and defensive structures etc.

However, ancient non-monarchies used their geographical locations differently as compared to monarchies. Rome and Athens were geographically located near the sea but they were at seas and trade routes respectively. This enabled them to grow and form alliances with much ease. In ancient Athens, the Mediterranean Sea presented huge opportunities for sea trading on which most of its economy was dependent. The democratic structure of the city-state allowed free male citizens to participate in decision-making processes which created a civic frame of joint responsibility to manage the resources (Ober, 2008). Unlike Greek or Athenian civilization, ancient Roman civilization also developed along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Its strategic geographical location helped it in growing its power. In the Roman Republic, a unique government system was established in which the power was divided between elected leaders and groups. This way of unique system and management helped Rome take care of its' huge areas well. Its powerful military helped Rome to oversee faraway kingdoms which made sure the resources came back to the city in a continuous flow. The expansionist policies of non-monarchies like the Romans reveal their belief that the diffusion of powers should lie within the government without not concentrating on one person.

The connection between geographical Position and governance shows the flexibility of ancient civilizations in creating political ideologies. Monarchies such as Egypt and China used their natural surroundings wisely to their advantage in centralizing their power to build up stable governments. The Nile and Yellow River had regular natural cycles that created vast fertile lands and became the lifelines of these ancient empires. Agriculture, trading and communication systems were highly dependent on these two rivers. Control over natural resources allowed the rulers to solidify their powers. They legitimized this power by using religious beliefs such as the god-like status of the Egyptian pharaohs or China's Mandate of Heaven. However, sometimes this centralization of power came at a cost as this system gave the ultimate ruling power to a single hand. This unchecked power on the one hand sometimes led to tyranny and discrimination by rulers becoming too oppressive. On the other hand, ancient non-monarchies such as Athens and Rome exploited their geographic positions for trading, allying and expanding territory. Their location near the sea and trade routes led to cultural

exchange and economic growth which further favoured participatory kinds of governance like democracy and republicanism. These systems promoted shared power with the view of involving a greater number of citizens in the processes of decision-making. But their strengths also had some weaknesses. The complex process of balancing different interests often led to inefficiency and internal conflict. This threatened the very stability which they sought to achieve. Monarchies preferred centralized authority to leverage their natural environments. But non-monarchies utilized geography to widen their spans and distribute powers. The common problem that both systems faced was the issue of the distribution of powers. The interplay between geographical location and political ideologies not only played a key role in shaping the administrative frameworks of these civilizations but also had an impact on society and social hierarchies regarding the distribution of power.

Body paragraph 2:

Women's positions in both ancient monarchies and non-monarchies show how different forms of government and their ideologies had different effects on social structures and the allocation of power. Monarchies often tied women's authority to their familial or royal connections which allowed some of them to achieve some sort of power indirectly. But non-monarchies continued to marginalize women's roles in political life despite emphasising equality and collective decision-making. These forms of government circumscribed women's lives differently but equally. In ancient monarchies, women were relegated to supporting roles to male authority such as queens, princesses and regents. Through family or marriage connections, these roles afforded them limited powers. In monarchies like ancient Egypt, the road to power by royal women was reached by association with the king or as a regent. Queen Hatshepsut seized power as pharaoh and took traditionally male titles to validate her position. According to Fletcher (2016), Hatshepsut's reign indicated

that the ancient Egyptian monarchies might permitted exceptional women to break through some social barriers at times due to either royal or divine influence. In ancient China, many empresses and consorts held a degree of influence in the imperial court. Wu Zetian is the only female emperor in ancient Chinese history who rose to power through her governance skills and strategic alliances. According to Ebrey (2022), Wu Zetian's rise was successful because the structured bureaucracy within the ancient Chinese monarchy system at that time allowed females to assume such positions. But these were very few and far between. Most women found themselves confined within the four walls of the monarchies.

In contrast, the non-monarchical governance structures in ancient Athens and Rome entirely omitted women from participation in any political activities. The democratic framework of Athens granted political rights exclusively to male citizens. Women were restricted to the home without political rights. The primary roles of women in Athens were overseeing households and raising children. According to Blundell (1995), Athenian women's absence from politics reflected the widespread patriarchal conventions seen in democratic societies. Similarly, women in ancient Rome were not allowed to hold public offices. But some elite Roman women could have an indirect influence on politics through family connections. Dixon (2001) explains that Roman women played their role according to the legal and cultural demands, which drew not on the contribution they might make to the public sphere but on their marriage and maternal roles.

Despite so many limitations, women in both governance systems attempted to exercise authority. Egyptian and Chinese royal women sponsored temples, art and literature and also became patrons of culture. These things strengthened their symbolic value in monarchical civilizations. In non-monarchies, the women of Athens and Rome indirectly aided political and economic initiatives by lending advice to their male kin or providing funds for public enterprises. These activities reveal a flexibility in the governance structures applicable to women. Monarchies such as societies or empires in ancient Egypt and China provided organized opportunities for women to practice power within some limitations. In contrast, non-monarchical societies like Athens and Rome cultivated

principles of equality and democracy while simultaneously barring women from significant political involvement. Both of these governance structures upheld patriarchal norms yet concurrently offered some distinct pathways for women to impact their communities. These positions illustrate the complex interplay between political systems and gender and show us how different governance systems influence societal expectations and power dynamics. It also underlines the resilience and adaptability of women negotiating the full deprivations created by society. The differences between monarchies and non-monarchies also reveal how power structures, whether it's centralized or shared, fundamentally shaped women's roles and opportunities in society.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the comparison between ancient monarchies and non-monarchies shows how geographical position, political ideologies and position of women in the society were influenced by the different governing systems. Monarchies like ancient Egyptian and the Chinese empire used their geographical location to establish a centralized authority. This centralised power structure helped the ruler to exercise their powers within vast areas and influence people with the help of centralized policy. In many monarchical systems, there existed the concept of divine or absolute authority which was used to sovereign influence over religious practices and other patterns of life. Whereas non-monarchies such as the Athenians and the Roman Republic adapted their political ideologies to conform with their respective geographical peculiarities. Athens being a mountainous region and with independent city-states, adopted a democratic system. At the same time, Rome lay at the centre with a commanding military power and set up a republic where decisions would be exercised by the elected representatives. Also, the status of women was not even similar between monarchies and non-monarchies. In monarchies like in ancient Egypt and China, women played a significant role and even influenced political and cultural life. But the rights of women were more grossly curtailed in the non-monarchies. In Athenian democracy, women could not participate in politics

and were restricted to housekeeping roles. In the Roman Republic, women enjoyed certain legal and social privileges but they were largely excluded from politics. These comparisons between ancient monarchies and non-monarchies show how governance was organized and greatly influenced societal norms, especially in gender roles and political organizations. Examining these ancient governance systems helps us to understand the complexity of ancient societies and how this still affects governance and social structures today.

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