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CHAPTER 8: CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY

The government authority is derived from the will of the people therefore, the people or citizens have a right to take part in the government through elections to determine who they want to have the government office. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. For democracy to deliver, citizens must be informed about issues that can improve their lives. To be informed, they need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information.

There are different barriers to citizen participation based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or status and we have to break down these barriers for full citizenship to be attained. Now, we are going to talk about citizen/citizenship. A citizen of a country has a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare off their country. Back in ancient Rome, being a citizen was looked at as a privilege because it wasn’t all the inhabitants of the Roma Empire that was given citizenship such as slaves, serfs and so on. When you’re a citizen, you enjoy certain liberties and rights as opposed to the slaves who could not enjoy them. But now, in the modern world, citizenship is conferred practically to the whole residents.

Citizenship may be acquired through different ways. It can be acquired by birth or naturalization. Citizenship acquired by birth means that a man becomes a citizen of a state if his parents are citizens or if he was born within the territory. Citizenship by birth is a very fundamental law in most countries. Citizenship by naturalization is the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his or her citizenship of a state to another.

Citizenship can be made up of civil, political and social citizenship. Civil citizenship deals with the rights necessary to protect individual liberty. Political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power. Lastly, social citizenship embodies the claim that citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live a civilized existence in accordance with the standards prevailing in society. Citizenship has a lot of definitions, meaning different things to different people, but to top it all of Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved.

As a citizen, one has rights. Rights and liberties enable men to love and develop fully. Right entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of the citizens. A right is defined as a privilege conferred by law upon a person or group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. Some civil rights are right to work. Right to freedom of religion, right to education and so on.

Moving on, we are going to talk about democracy. The word democracy is derived from a Greek word *‘demos’* meaning people and *‘kratos’* meaning rule. Democracy originated from ancient Greece where the citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws. Every citizen was expected to participate in the running of the government. This is what was seen as direct democracy, a system that enables people exercise authority themselves. Abraham Lincoln, former American President defined democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people. He said that democracy is a government of the people designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state. There are many definitions of democracy but we can deduce from them are the following features such as fundamental rights of the citizen are guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary, existence of rule of law and so on.

As said earlier, citizens have duties and responsibilities in a Democracy. Democratic citizens know that they both have rights and responsibilities. For democracy to thrive, the citizens must be active because the failure and success of the government lies on them. Some of the responsibilities are as follows; Firstly, a citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote. People who are unhappy with their leaders are free to organize and peacefully make the case for change or try to vote those leaders out. Secondly, A citizen should be willing to pay taxes. This is because without taxes there are no fund for the democratic government. Paying taxes helps in the provision of needs for the citizens. Thirdly, A citizen must obey the law. Democracy and lawlessness cannot coexist and as such citizens must be ready to assist the law enforcement officers by reporting breaches of the law and by giving them any useful information they may have. Furthermore, a good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticism. He shouldn’t stir up racial or class division which may lead to bloodshed or chaos.

In addition, A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community. He should not interfere with the belongings of others. He should make contributions to the advancement of the nation. He should be honest and hardworking. Lastly, a good citizen must support public education. They can show their support through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts. Public education is the stronghold of democracy, meant to educate children to be responsible and knowledgeable participants in the democratic process.

In conclusion, Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government through voting. It is considered as the best form of government as it allows citizens to exercise their rights and enjoy it too. Also, citizens paly an important role in democracy meaning that there will be no democracy without the citizens.