GST 203

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**Two page review of Chapter 8, Citizens Role in a Democracy**

Sovereignty resides and flows from the people in a democracy. The people in democracy have a right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The people have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections in order to determine who will legitimately occupy the governmental offices.

These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions the world over. They capture the foundation that democratic government is of the people, by the people and for the people. This means that the government belongs to the people, governmental processes belong to the people and elections belong to the people. There is so democracy without the engagements of the people.

For democracy to deliver, citizens must be informed about the issues that can improve their lives. The citizens must be free to come together in order to express their views, rights and works to see that the government responds to their views, thus holding those in government accountable. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information. Access to information is important to an informed citizenry. This is why transparency is a necessity for democracy.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

***Citizen/Citizenship:*** The term citizen has a political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and the government. Citizens have rights and responsibilities such as the rights to participate in decisions that affect public welfare.

In Ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged one called a citizen in a Roman Empire because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants. To be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights compared to other people who are not citizens.

Citizenship of a state can be acquired either by birth or naturalisation. An individual becomes a citizen of a state if his parents are from that state or he or she is born within the territory of the state. On the other hand, the process by which an individual willingly changes his or her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalisation. However, the conditions in which naturalisation are conferred varies from one country to another.

Citizenship is divided into:

* Civil citizenship: refers to rights necessary to protect individuals Liberty eg freedom of speech, justice
* Political citizenship: this is associated with the participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by the members of the community
* Social citizenship: it embodies that citizens are meant to have access to resources that allows them to live a civilised life, in accordance with the standards prevailing in society

***Citizens’ rights:***

In order for citizens to have a say in the running of his or her government, there are a number of rights that are essential in the community. Rights entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen. A right can therefore be defined as “a privilege or advantage conferred by law upon a person or group”. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. If the civil rights of a citizen is invaded by another citizen or the government, then he or she is liable to seek redress in the court of law.

**Democracy**

The concept of democracy originated from Ancient Greece where in the city states, citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. This is what Johnston classified as a direct democracy in which it is a system that enables peoples to exercise authority themselves.

Abraham Lincoln, who was a former American president described democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Since there is no single definition for democracy, what can be deduced from the various definitions are the following features:

* The fundamental rights of the citizen is guaranteed
* Independent and impartial judiciary
* Existence of rule of law

**Duties and responsibilities of Citizen in a Democracy**

All citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognise that not only do they have rights, but they also have responsibilities to the state if they are to benefit from its protection of their rights. In order for democracy to succeed, citizens of the state must be active, not passive. This is because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility and no one else’s. Therefore, citizens are expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

* A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote
* A citizen should be willing to pay taxes
* A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law
* A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticism but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies
* A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community