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***CHAPTER 8***

***CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY***

The people have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government derives from the will of the people in their choice of these system, and the people have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices. These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions the world over. Government belongs to the people; and elections belong to the people. There is no democracy without the citizens.

For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. They must be free to come together to express their views and preferences and work to see that government responds to citizens’ views, thus holding those in government accountable. Transparency is necessary for democracy.

There are multiple barriers to citizen participation in every country. They are both subtle and obvious, small and formidable, and based on numerous factors. These barriers must be removed for full citizenship to be achieved. They need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority, along with the skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and hold public officials accountable. Democracy is the involvement or active participation of the people in governance that brings about development.

*Conceptual Clarification*

*Citizen/Citizenship*

The term citizen has a political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged status to be called citizens because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Modern states confer citizens on practically their whole residents or population. In reality the essence of a state is to provide opportunities to enable citizens to lead the good life.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalisation. Citizenship determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. The process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state is known as naturalization. The condition under which naturalisation are conferred vary from country to country.

Citizenship is divided or can be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship, and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty ; political citizenship is associated with 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 such a community; and 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 does not have just one definition; it means different things to different people. However according to Glover there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship.

* Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship.
* Integrative citizenship involves the belief that every individual plays an assortment of roles, and that this form of citizenship enables the individual to integrate their various roles, and to immerse themselves into the community, hence causing them to have a greater appreciation of the collective.
* Educative citizenship, according to Dagger is the process that develops a moral, practical, and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship.

*Citizen’s Rights*

In order to let the citizen, have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. Rights entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizens. A right can be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right.

*Democracy*

Etymologically the word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is “rule by the people”. The concept of democracy first originated from ancient Greece where in the city states, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws. This classified as direct democracy a system that enables people exercise authority themselves.

The Greek democracy was a limited institution in that it excluded labourers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. The idea that all citizens, high or low, within the state are entitled to take part in the running of the affairs of their state was first advocated in England after the great civil war of the seventeenth century. The American colonies, having revolted against England successfully, developed democratic ideas and institution as a way of life. Today, democracy or representative government is associated with the free discussion of political views, the right to differ concerning them and the settlement of differences by counting of votes.

Abraham Lincoln, former American President, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

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

* The fundamental rights of the citizens are guaranteed
* Independent and impartial judiciary
* Existence of press
* Periodic election that is free and fair

*Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy*

Democratic citizens recognise that they not only have rights, they have responsibilities. A government of the people demands constant vigilance and support by the people. For democracy to succeed, the citizens must be active, not passive, because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility, and no one else’s. citizens are expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes.
3. A citizen must have a duty to obey the law
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
5. A citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
6. A citizen must support public education in every way possible.

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